University of Alberta

Spirituality among Immigrant Children Adjusting to Life Challenges

By

Farah Nanji ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
In
Counselling Psychology

Department of Educational Psychology

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall 2007

Library and
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-33037-1
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-33037-1

NOTICE:
The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:
L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Sulaiman,
who has always inspired and encouraged me to manifest
my dreams and pursue meaningful and challenging areas
of personal and professional exploration.

I will forever be grateful for his continued love,
friendship and encouragement

ABSTRACT

Pioneers in Western social sciences such as William James and G. Stanley Hall considered the study of religion and spirituality essential to understanding individuals and the human experience. Unfortunately, over the last several decades, the study of spirituality in psychology has been marginalized. Recently however, there has been a resurgence of interest in understanding the role and development of spirituality in the lives of individuals and communities. This resurgence is in part due to the increase in cultural and ethnic diversity among individuals residing in westernized nations. With their settlement, migrants have arrived with spiritual beliefs that inform their worldview, particularly when facing adversity. As a result, the study of spirituality has become a critical component of cross-cultural research and informed clinical practice in psychology.

Immigrant families face several adverse life events that may disrupt functioning and increase their risk for psychological maladjustment. Notably, these populations have not exhibited higher rates of emotional distress than non-immigrants. Research suggests that a critical and natural source of strength and resilience is spirituality. Despite the influence of spirituality in immigrant adjustment, no research to date has explored spirituality among immigrant children facing life challenges. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore immigrant children's spirituality and the role it plays in their explanations for and adjustment to challenging life events. Six immigrant children ages 4 through 6 years and their parent(s) who self-identified spirituality as a source of influence in family life, were invited to take part in this study. Children and their parents participated in separate semi-structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions. Children were also engaged in non-verbal play strategies designed to elicit their understandings of spirituality and how these understandings impacted their mental health. Interviews with the children reveal that participants have a notion of spirituality that is unique, detailed and elaborate and cannot be entirely explained by their current religious or cultural upbringings. Interviews further convey children's spirituality significantly facilitates their attempts to adjust to and

understand immigrant-related life challenges. Exploring children's unique perspectives of spirituality and the role this plays in their own healing process may support the utilization of this process in the overall understanding and treatment of children's health.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the contribution, guidance, and support of several individuals to whom I am extremely grateful. Most importantly, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Noorfarah Merali, whose insight and tireless efforts are interwoven in the words and thoughts of this document. Her unwavering faith and confidence in my abilities as well as her commitment and enthusiasm for this research endeavor were immeasurable in the completion of this work. She will always be an outstanding example of a clinician-scientist, a valuable mentor and a treasured friend.

I am also sincerely grateful to all the members of my dissertation committee for their support and guidance throughout this work: Dr. Tracey Derwing, Dr. Denise Larsen, Dr. Barbara Paulson, Dr. Anna Kirova, and Dr. Robert Short. I am especially thankful to Dr. Tracey Derwing for her valuable insights, thoughts and critiques that ultimately strengthened the research process and the quality of this work.

I also extend my deepest appreciation to the individuals across the various contact agencies whose efforts to connect with immigrant families and enthusiasm about this work encouraged several families to consider participation. Immense appreciation is also extended to the participants of this study for their honesty and willingness to discuss personal and private aspects of their lives in order to support the enhancement of research and learning in the area of immigrant children's spirituality. I also especially acknowledge the children for sharing their thoughts, ideas, challenges and resilience without boundary or hesitation. I will forever be awed and inspired by their wisdom and way of being in the world.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the generous financial support and travel allowances provided. In particular, I thank the family of the late Sir Isaac Walter Killam for their generous Memorial Scholarship Fund and continued support of Canadian researchers in the social sciences. As well, I would like to acknowledge the generosity of the

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, the Faculty of Education, and the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta for their continued financial contributions throughout my doctorate training and research pursuits.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the unconditional support, encouragement and love of my family. To my parents, Pyarali and Zarina Bhimani, whose life path demonstrates the power of spirituality to overcome the most challenging of life circumstances, I express my sincere gratitude for their unwavering faith in all that I have chosen to do. Their strength and perseverance will forever inspire me. To my older brother, Nurali, I extend my deepest gratitude for his continued trust in my abilities and for always encouraging me to believe in myself and overcome life's many ups and downs. Lastly, I want to thank my dearest husband and best friend, Sulaiman, for walking this challenging path with me and for inspiring me to achieve the highest standards of professional achievement. I am especially grateful for his love during times of joy, his teaching during times of growth, and his strength during times of difficulty.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION 1

Purpose of the Study and Overview 2

Immigrant Experience 3
  Understanding Culture, Ethnicity and Migration 4
  Process of Migration & Effect on Family and Child Functioning 5
    Pre-Migration 5
    Act of Migration 7
    Initial Adjustment 8
    Period of Crisis 11
  Therapeutic Issues 13
    Conflicting Value Systems 13
    Biculturalism 14
    Ethnicity and Language 15
  Mental Health and Spirituality Among Immigrants 16

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW 20

The Construct of Spirituality 20
  Relationality 22
  Feelings, Acts, and Experiences 24
  Spirituality and Religion 25

Spirituality in Children 28
  Fowler's Faith Development Theory 29
  Robert Coles: The Spiritual Live of Children 33
  Spiritual Versus Religious Development in Children 36
  Relational Consciousness 37
  Developmental Support for Children's Spirituality 42
    Theories of Self 42
    Cognitive and Social Development 44
    Behaviourism and Social Learning Theories 48
    Humanistic Psychology and Attachment Theory 48
    Neurological Evidence 50

Functions of Spirituality 53

Culturally Sensitive Intervention 56

Statement of Problem 60
  Purpose of the Study 62

Chapter 3
METHOD ... 63

Understanding the Paradigm ... 63
  Basic Qualitative Inquiry ... 65
  Identifying the Research Question and the Researcher's History ... 69
  Language ... 75
  Holistic/Part-Whole Relationship ... 76

Research Participants ... 77
  Selection and Recruitment Process ... 78
  Description of Participants ... 80
    Participant Introductions ... 81

Gathering the Data ... 83
  Role of the Researcher ... 84
  Journaling ... 85
  Interviews ... 86

Understanding and Responding to the Data ... 87
  The Interview Process ... 89
    Parent Interviews ... 90
    Child Interviews ... 93
    Additional interviews ... 98
  Recording and Handling Data ... 99

Presentation of Findings ... 100
  Narrative Analysis ... 101
  Analysis of Narratives ... 102

Study Evaluation ... 103
  Validity and Reliability ... 106
    Triangulation ... 107

Chapter 4
INTERVIEWING OLEK ... 108

Introduction ... 108
Immigration and Cultural background ... 109
Family's Spirituality, Religious Beliefs, and Practices ... 112
Meeting Olek ... 115
Explanation of Death ... 117
Understanding and Utilization of God ... 121
Understanding of His Own Origin ... 126
Second Meeting ... 129
Adversity and God's Magic Powers ... 130
Resiliency ... 132
Saying Goodbye ... 134

Chapter 5
INTERVIEWING ROSIE ... 135

- Introduction ... 135
- Immigration and Cultural background ... 136
- Family's Spirituality, Religious Beliefs, and Practices ... 140
- Meeting Rosie ... 142
- Talking to Friends ... 146
- Life Challenges ... 149
- Understanding God ... 151
- Second Meeting ... 155
- Saying Goodbye ... 160

Chapter 6
INTERVIEWING TANNER ... 161

- Introduction ... 161
- Immigration and Cultural background ... 162
- Family's Spirituality, Religious Beliefs, and Practices ... 164
- Tanner and the Playroom ... 165
- The Great Wizard ... 166
- Soul, Spirit, and Imagination ... 170
- Haikin ... 173
- Second Meeting ... 177
- Saying Goodbye ... 182

Chapter 7
INTERVIEWING EMILEE ... 183

- Introduction ... 183
- Immigration and Cultural background ... 184
- Family's Spirituality, Religious Beliefs, and Practices ... 186
- Meeting Emilee ... 188
- God, Wishing Stars, and Emilee's Adversity ... 189
- Emilee's Babies ... 193
- Second Meeting ... 196
- Saying Goodbye ... 199

Chapter 8
INTERVIEWING JAYIN ... 200

- Introduction ... 200
- Immigration and Cultural Background ... 201
- Family's Spirituality, Religious Beliefs, and Practices ... 202
- Meeting Jayin ... 204
- Spending Time with God ... 205
- Life Challenges and God's Helpers ... 210
- Understanding of His Own Origin ... 213
- Second Meeting ... 215
- Saying Goodbye ... 220

Chapter 9
INTERVIEWING KUSHI 222

- Introduction 222
- Immigration and Cultural background 223
- Family's Spirituality, Religious Beliefs, and Practices 225
- Meeting Kushi 227
- Kushi and the Disneyland Princesses 230
- Resiliency 232
- Second Meeting 234
- Saying Goodbye 236

Chapter 10
IMMIGRATION, SPIRITUALITY, AND ADAPTATION 238

- Immigration Challenges 238
  - Food, Shelter, and Underemployment 239
  - Cultural and Social Isolation 240
  - Separation from Family 241
  - Biculturalism and Ethnic Identity 242

- Existence of Divinity 243
  - Divinity Works through Mediums 245
  - Divinity Works through the Child 246

- Invoking Divinity 246

- Spirituality through Relationship 247
  - Relationship with the Divine 247
  - Relationship with Nature 248
  - Relationship with Inanimate Objects 248

- The Boundless Self 249

- Spiritual Infrastructure 250

- Meaning-Making and Existentialism 251

- Spirituality and Positive Coping 252
  - Divine as Caretaker 253
  - Emotional Adjustment and Self-Change 254
  - Transcendence of the Present Moment 255
  - Change of Others 256

- Conclusion 257

Chapter 11
DISCUSSION 259

- Immigration Challenges 260
  - Parental Perspectives 260

    Child Perspectives 263

  Conceptions of Spirituality 265
    Relationality 266
    Feelings, Acts, and Experiences 267
    Religiosity and Spirituality 269
    Spirituality as Meaning-Making 271

  Spiritual Capacity 271

  Functions of Spirituality 275

  Implications 277
    Assessment of Children's Spirituality 278
      Relationship 278
      Setting 279
      Interview Skills and Techniques 280
    Intervention 282

  Limitations 284

  Future Research Directions 285

  Researcher's Experience 286

  Concluding Remarks 287

REFERENCES 289

APPENDIX A: Study Description 301

APPENDIX B: Staff Confidentiality Agreement 302

APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form 303

APPENDIX D: Child Assent Form 305

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Categories of Spiritual Sensitivity in Children 38

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Olek's Pet Snake 116

Figure 2: Olek's Anaconda 119

Figure 3: Olek's Demonstration of where "Big God" lives 122

Figure 4: Rosie's Friend Rainbow 145

Figure 5: Rosie's Friend Gray-ee 147

Figure 6: Rosie's Fairy Princess 148

Figure 7: Rosie's Picture of God 153

Figure 8: The Great Wizard Fancon 166

Figure 9: Haikin 173

Figure 10: Angel 174

Figure 11: Queen 174

Figure 12: Re-creation of Haikin 181

Figure 13: Emilee's Baby 193

Figure 14: Burying the Princesses 231

Figure 15: Kushi Dancing 232

Figure 16: Magic Tiara 233

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

According to the 2001 census, 18% of Canada's total population consists of immigrants from countries other than the United States (Statistics Canada, 2001). Many immigrants who come to Canada often arrive with the expectation of a better life for themselves and for their families. Unfortunately, there are several challenges related to the migration process and settlement that are often underestimated (Sue & Sue, 2003). For children of immigrant families, several factors may disrupt optimal childhood functioning such as unrealistic expectations about their life in the host country, ambivalence about leaving one's home country, separation from nuclear or extended family members, family conflict related to the decision to migrate, changes in family socioeconomic status, social isolation after migration, and difficulties with cultural integration after migration (Lago & Thompson, 1996). Because immigrant children encounter multiple migration-related stressful life events during their formative and critical years of maturation, their risk for psychological maladjustment is heightened (Thomas, 2000). Despite these risks, research on immigrant children and adults has found that they do not exhibit higher rates of psychological distress than their Canadian-born counterparts (Beiser et al., 1998; Health Canada, 1999). Research suggests that a critical and natural source of strength and resilience for immigrant families is spirituality (Health Canada, 1999).

Across cultures and fields of research no consensus has been reached on the definition of spirituality. However, a common understanding among definitions is that spirituality can be broadly understood as the feelings, acts, experiences, and connections related to whatever one may consider as divine or transcendent (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Due to perceived connections between the spiritual and material world, immigrants have been found to often attribute negative life events/circumstances to unnatural or supernatural causes and to view the solutions to their difficulties to be externally influenced (Richards & Bergin, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2003). It is important to consider that this attribution can be either a helpful or hindering force in a child's developmental process. The ability to transcend the present situation and feel a sense of connection and unity beyond the self (Nye

& Hay, 1996) may assist children in removing themselves from the impact of adverse life events. Perceiving external or spiritual influences over one's current problems may also increase one's resiliency and optimism in the face of adversity (Nye & Hay, 1998; Piechowski, 2001; Scott, 2003; Sexon, 2004). Congregational acts of worship may further activate community or social supports that can facilitate coping (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Alternatively, when adverse life events are attributed to external events or spiritual factors, this may encourage passive coping in relation to the stressful life events (Sexon; Sue & Sue, 2003). This may further discourage the child to seek support or to initiate healing attempts, especially when the illness is considered as divinely activated and purposeful to one's life experiences.

Presently, very little is understood about how children conceptualize spirituality and the role it plays in their lives. Although recent efforts have been made to better understand spirituality in children, there is limited research dedicated to understanding how children themselves view and conceptualize spirituality (Mabe & Josephson, 2004; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Piechowski, 2001). The majority of existing studies on spirituality in children utilize retrospective methods based on adult recollections of childhood spiritual experiences (Hoffman, 1992; Nelson & Hart, 2003). In other studies, interviews with parents are used as the primary vehicle for understanding their children's spiritual conceptions and expressions (Harrison, 2000; Hart, 2003). Furthermore, existing research has not examined the role spirituality plays among children adjusting to negative life events apart from medical illness (Frangoulls, Jordan, & Lansdown, 1996; Stuber & Houskamp, 2003).

Purpose of Study and Overview

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to better understand spirituality among immigrant children who are adjusting to adverse life events from their own perspective. An understanding of the nature and function(s) of immigrant children's spirituality would assist counsellors and mental health professionals working with children facing adversity to incorporate these concepts into the helping process.

Presented first is the introduction, which addresses the immigrant experience in Canada with particular emphasis on the circumstances of children and families. The findings pertaining to the resiliency of immigrant children will be highlighted along with protective factors, including spirituality. This will be followed by a literature review, which includes a presentation of the construct of spirituality and its various definitions across disciplines. The literature on children's spirituality will then be reviewed, followed by an outline of the possible functions of spirituality in mental health and adjustment. The importance of understanding and incorporating children's spirituality in culturally sensitive counselling is then discussed, followed by a statement of the problem and the guiding research questions. Next, in the methodology chapter, the paradigm informing the research, criteria for participation, the interview process and presentation of research findings are described. The subsequent chapters present individual chronological interview narratives for each of the six participating immigrant children. The integration chapter that follows identifies key themes related to immigration, spirituality and adaptation emerging from the interviews. The final discussion chapter of this dissertation places the research findings in the context of existing literature and outlines further directions for research and practice.

Immigrant Experience

Immigrant children and families living in Canada face unique life experiences that differentiate their mental health needs and characteristics from their Canadian-born counterparts. This section aims to describe the immigrant experience and to review the circumstances at all stages of the migration process. As well, possible adverse life events and challenges that may contribute to specific developmental needs and mental health concerns will be addressed, with particular emphasis on the experiences of children. Understanding the nature of culture and its significance in the Canadian context is an important pre-requisite for appreciating the immigrant experience.

Understanding Culture, Ethnicity and Migration

The term *culture* is comprehensively defined by Matsumoto (2000) as:

> A dynamic system of rules, explicit and implicit, established by groups in order to ensure their survival, involving attitudes, values, beliefs, norms, and behaviours, shared by a group but harboured differently by each specific unit within the group, communicated across generations, relatively stable but with the potential to change across time (p.24).

This definition entails a broad understanding of culture that considers the social construction of groups defined by a common race, ethnicity, language, religion, geographic location and nationality, as well as by common life experiences. These factors collectively represent the concept of ethnicity, which McGoldrick and Giordano (1996) describe as a common ancestry through which individuals have evolved shared values and customs that are deeply tied to the family, and are important in establishing one's identity. The definition of culture suggests that individuals may belong to a large cultural grouping and still vary in the degree to which the characteristics of their culture are practiced. Similarly, individuals may belong to several cultures and may hold an integrated cultural worldview.

Cultural diversity and pluralism have defined the Canadian context for many generations. The value and recognition of this diversity is best articulated in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988) which states: "multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity…it provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada's future" (Government of Canada, 2001, p.2). The Multiculturalism Act pertains to cultural diversity in terms of ethnicity, national background, religious and spiritual practices and beliefs, and other cultural norms and values within a bilingual framework. The Act gives all Canadians the right to preserve their unique cultural heritage.

Berry and Kim (1988) have identified five groups that represent the cultural diversity in Canada. These are: (1) First Nations people, (2) refugees, (3) immigrants, (4) established ethnic groups, and (5) sojourners. These groups are differentiated based on three criteria: voluntariness, permanence, and mobility. *Voluntariness* represents the relative degree of choice one had in moving to Canada and/or being immersed with people from other cultures. *Permanence* addresses the duration of the intercultural contact or move; an individual's stay may be temporary, long term, or permanent. *Mobility* refers to migrant groups who move from one nation/region to another, as well as sedentary groups that have had increasing intercultural contact in their homeland (Berry & Kim). Each of the five groups faces unique challenges and advantages in Canadian society that may affect their mental health. In order to effectively respond to the unique needs and experiences of the groups, it is important to understand the unique characteristics of immigrants.

Immigrants are people who move from one nation or region to another with the intent that the move be permanent. Typically, the migration is a choice that the individual or family perceives will improve their social, educational, and/or employment opportunities. Thus, immigrants are a mobile group whose resulting intercultural contact in Canada is by choice and intended to be permanent (Berry & Kim, 1988). According to the 2001 census, about 18% of Canada's total population consists of immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2001). The vast majority of immigrants (about 93%) reside in urban centers (e.g., Vancouver and Toronto) where in many cases they make up a significant proportion of the population (Statistics Canada). The regions of origin for recent immigrants are as follows: Asia/Pacific (54%); Africa and Middle East (18%); Europe (18%); Americas (10%) (Statistics Canada).

Process of Migration & Effect on Family and Child Functioning

Immigrant populations face many challenges throughout their migration process, particularly upon arrival into Canada and throughout the acculturation experience. As such, the following section will outline the unique experiences of the migration process and the resulting impact on immigrant children and families.

Pre-migration. Immigrants, as compared with other migrant groups, are distinguished in their ability to have choice as to where, when, and why to migrate to a new country. The catalyst to this decision however is often disharmony or difficulty in their present life and sociocultural environment (Guernina, 1993). Families may feel forced to escape current realities or perceived future difficulties in their country of origin, or simply to provide opportunity for their families. Thus, most come to the decision to migrate based on the perception of and expectation for a better life for themselves and their children in the host country.

The traumatic effects of immigration may begin when a family or individual decides to emigrate. The decision-making process for the family is often the responsibility of the adult members, or in a patriarchal culture, the decision may be made by the adult males in the family. In either case, the decision is usually not made by all members of the family system, especially not the children. This may cause initial resentment towards the decision maker(s) and disharmony among the family members. Levenbach and Lewak (1995) suggest that the decision to emigrate can resonate for years in the family system and cause conflicts among members who were in agreement or disagreement with the decision.

The impact of migration on the family may differ depending on whether or not the decision maker(s) is basing his or her choice on knowledge and a realistic assessment of the new country or on expectations that the migration will provide a second chance for the family. In the first case, many individuals wishing to emigrate will make attempts to approach the appropriate consulate or political infrastructure available to access information about the new country and the process of immigration (Levenbach & Lewak, 1995). Unfortunately, as in the case of Canadian infrastructure, even when individuals take this approach, they are often misinformed and do not receive realistic information about their future prospects once arriving in Canada. Alternatively, in situations where they are accurately informed about the immigration process, interested individuals may not believe the information and maintain the notion that circumstances will eventually evolve in their favour. For example, individuals may develop a false idea that their foreign educational credentials may be accepted in Canada or that they may not face other barriers to economic or social integration (Victoria, Settlement Counsellor, personal communication, February 16, 2003). Some individuals may inform their decision process to migrate by traveling to the new country prior to arranging for family members to arrive. This process often involves its own disadvantages including, separation from loved ones and a break in the family system often resulting in issues of resentment, abandonment, and frustration (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). When the decision to migrate is based exclusively on idealistic expectations and wishes, the inevitable disillusionment that follows when people encounter barriers such as difficulties in language acquisition, unemployment, discrimination, and limited health care access, may lead some family members to feelings of depression and result in further family discord, specifically towards the decision maker (Subota, 1986).

Act of migration. The actuality of migration is characterized by a considerable sense of loss by many immigrant families. There is often a loss of significant people, as many families leave additional nuclear or extended family members behind, as well as a loss of common culture, sense of belonging, first language, property, financial security, predictability and overall familiarity. These losses are often not acknowledged by the family directly by way of grieving or mourning what has been left behind; new challenges immediately facing the family often take precedence. For many immigrants these feelings of loss remain throughout their duration in the new country and are often accompanied by a wonder as to what may have happened if they had remained in their home country. In addition, some immigrants may develop expectations of returning. These feelings of loss often inhibit the acculturation process and acceptance of the new life, especially when the "old life" is remembered as ideal (Abu Baker, 1999), which is prevalent among many of those who may have felt forced to leave their homelands.

The act of migration can also occur in phases, with family members staggering their arrival, as mentioned earlier relating to the decision to emigrate. This process of staggering migration often relates to how the family has chosen to enter the country and whether or not the family is entering the new country legally or through illegal methods. For example, in the case of family sponsorship, an individual who migrates initially is faced with the responsibility of establishing a specific level of financial security before he or she may be eligible to apply for additional family members to come to Canada. This staggered migration can be a very lengthy process for the family causing significant separations and reunifications among family members. Whether the separation is between partners or between parents and their child(ren), the loss is significant for all members of the family. It is in the process of reunification of the family where particular complications in family relationships have been frequently reported especially in terms of disrupted attachments with children (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). Partida (1996) explains that over the course of time, the family may have evolved in such a way that excludes the absent parent or family members, which makes the process of reunification another transitional challenge for family functioning. In addition, the decision maker, often a parent, may expect the other family members to be grateful for his or her sacrifices but instead often finds that the children are ambivalent about rejoining the parents in the new country (Boti & Bautista, 1999; Sciarra, 1999).

Initial adjustment. In the first year of arrival into the new country, many immigrants are often focused on survival tasks based on the immediate needs of the family. The initial culture shock, or feeling overwhelmed by the unfamiliar environment, is characterized by the discrepancy between the country of origin and the new country (Sue & Sue, 2003). For example, many immigrants may be exposed to extreme differences in geographic, social, political, technological and cultural climates. This drastic adjustment may often require that the family cope with their immediate circumstances and rapidly initiate the survival process (Levenbach & Lewak, 1995). Thus, learning the language, adjusting to customs, finding secure income and residence take much of their time and energy. An Edmonton based settlement counsellor, Victoria, explained that many immigrants arrive to Canada without a place to live, work, or any awareness of their final settlement destination (Personal communication, February 16, 2003).

According to Levenbach and Lewak (1995), the period of initial adjustment often masks the initial dissonance between one's established identity and the expectations of the family with the expectations and norms of the new culture. Thus, the process of acculturation, and the conflicts and symptoms that may arise are in abeyance. From a trauma perspective, this initial stage is also characterized by a sense of denial and isolation, where reaction formations often occur when separation pain and loss are compounded by a lack of belonging and acceptance in the new country (Levenbach & Lewak).

In this initial stage, the family may often function harmoniously and somewhat euphorically towards the common goal of survival and therefore appear to be adjusting well. Sluzki (1979) suggests that families may exaggerate cultural norms and behaviours affiliated with the home country in order to remain connected and secure within the family system and to provide initial support for one another. When this initial stage and sense of 'panic to survive' stabilizes, difficulties in individual and family functioning often emerge and tend to surprise the family system. This is particularly true between children and their adult family members, whose experience of the host country is often very different. Children, who enter the school system, are sometimes exposed to resources related to the acquisition of the host language and perhaps even an immediate sense of social support through their teachers and classmates (Hicks, Lalonde, & Pepler, 1993). When this occurs, there is a rapid inclusion of children into the host culture which can differentiate the experience of the family as a unit. In other cases however, immigrant children may experience discrimination, racism, or social exclusion in the school context, which can strengthen their reliance on the family unit (Merali, 2004) or encourage rapid acculturation in order to adapt to the host culture (Berry & Kim, 1988). In either case, immigrant children's experiences are often very different than those of their parents.

In terms of language issues, developing competency in either of Canada's official languages plays a critical role in the adjustment of immigrants into Canadian society. Language skills are one of the major barriers to participation in the labour force and school system and consequently, to successful integration into Canadian society (Arthur & Merali, 2005). Second-language programs may provide basic language skills, but they are not equivalent to the experience of learning language through development in a particular culture. Learning a new language can trigger feelings of loss of cultural identity, longing for one's homeland, and interaction with others who share language and other aspects of culture (Bemak et al., 1996). Frustrations can also lead individuals to question their capacity for mastering language in the new culture, resulting in reduced feelings of competence and self-esteem. Beyond skill levels, the degree to which new Canadians feel confident about using English is related to their psychosocial and cultural adaptation (Dion, Dion, & Pak, 1990). Due to their age and increased contact with others through school young children frequently acquire language skills at a faster pace than adult members of the family. As a result, role reversals can occur when children are placed in a position to translate for their parents or grandparents, creating an unusual shift in power within family relationships (Baptiste, 1993). An additional barrier in limited language acquisition can occur with respect to understanding and seeking mental health and social services, especially those designed specifically for supporting immigrant adjustment (Beiser et al., 1998). This may be of particular concern for young immigrant children whose concept of mental health are limited by their current experiences, rather than in comparison to a previous life and sense of "normal". Often times, the only life children are aware of having is the one they are presently experiencing.

Immigrants also face pervasive economic challenges after migration, particularly related to employment. This has a major influence on both the psychosocial well-being and adaptation of immigrants (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Westwood & Ishiyama, 1991). Due to differences in training and educational standards, many immigrants are employed in positions that are far inferior in status and income compared to their home country, termed downward mobility. In an analysis of national census data over the 25 year period from 1970 to 1995, Reitz (2001) found a downward trend in immigrant employment status and earnings, suggesting that the barriers they face are increasing over time. He reported that the advantage of higher education for employability and income potential that exists for native-born Canadians does not generalize to immigrant populations. The increasing level of education of native-born Canadians was cited as an additional factor that leads to the displacement of immigrants with foreign credentials in the national job market.

Downward mobility often leads to immigrants living below the poverty line, which has significant negative consequences on the family relationship and structure, as well as direct consequences on child development and health (Beiser et al., 1998). Often times, immigrant families are forced to have several members employed in order to have sufficient financial resources. Another consequence to downward mobility is the change in social class that often ensues. This is particularly challenging for those immigrants who come from countries with strict social class distinctions, where associations with members of a different social hierarchy is not common. Upon immigration, individuals may prefer to maintain contact with others of the same social class, which downward mobility may prevent (Beiser et al.; Reitz). Despite the multiple obstacles to equitable work force participation among immigrants, recent data shows that over several years many immigrants recover their pre-migration socioeconomic status attesting to their remarkable resilience (Health Canada, 1999).

Period of crisis. Crisis in immigration may result from racial discrimination and disruptions in the family system. These will be discussed in turn below.

The receptivity of the receiving country is generally believed to have a large impact on the mental health of immigrants (Beiser et al., 1998). Despite Canada's pride in being a culturally pluralistic society, attitudes towards diverse groups continue to show a hierarchy of preferences (Kalin & Berry, 1996). Interaction with members of the host culture and their institutions provide daily reminders for some immigrants that they do not fit in among the prevailing cultural group. The experience of racism and discrimination can have long-term effects on mental health during the acculturation process such as depression and loss of self-esteem (Beiser et al.); immigrants may experience feelings of inferiority and a sense of otherness due to ethnic prejudice. For example, Tousignant (1997) reported negative attitudes of people in Quebec society towards immigrants from the Indian subcontinent. Similarly, in reporting the findings of the *Housing New Canadians Project* in Toronto, Dion (2001) found high rates of perceived discrimination among the most visible immigrant groups. Dion and Kawakami (1996) obtained similar patterns of results in a study of perceived employment discrimination among visible and non-visible immigrant groups in Toronto.

Immigrants may also be targeted for hate crimes and violence. In a study of nine major urban centers in Canada in 1994, it was estimated that 60,000 hate crimes were committed against racial minorities (61%) and religious minorities (23%) (Canadian Heritage, 1998). There are also further indirect effects to consider for the impact of racism and discrimination in areas such as educational opportunity, housing and employment. This racism and discrimination further limits immigrants' socioeconomic development and inclusion into the majority population often resulting in resentment, hostility, and rejection of their cultural attributes (Sue & Sue, 2003). Conversely, newcomers may often arrive with pre-existing racism of particular groups in the country of arrival, which precludes contact with certain individuals and further limits their social and cultural integration. Furthermore, children are faced with unique challenges such as their forced inclusion into their host culture via entrance into the school system. For very young immigrant children, their exposure to discrimination personally can be confusing and painful as their development of self and cultural identity has only begun to formulate. As a consequence, young children may begin to deny or resent components of their racial or cultural identity (e.g., hair, skin colour, language, food, etc.). During later childhood and adolescence, peer acceptance becomes increasingly important and the forced inclusion of school and contact with diverse ethnic groups may create even more direct ethnic and racial challenges for immigrant youth.

This period of crisis also causes disruption in the family system and may bring families into counselling or to other health care providers. This stage is characterized by the family's need to maximize their compatibility and adjustment with their new environment (Levenbach & Lewak, 1995; Sluzki, 1979). During this time, the establishment of ethnic identity across individual family members often begins. For each member, this process may result in varying degrees of integration and acculturation related to the acceptance of new cultural norms and maintenance of previous ones. In this service of adaptation to a new cultural and ethnic identity, certain habits and traits must be abandoned and new ones created and accepted. This process is not typically arrived at through a conscious negotiation among family members, but rather arises through conflict and discord. Examples of the therapeutic issues that typically occur for immigrant families are outlined next.

While these therapeutic issues are not exclusive to ethnic minority immigrant families, there are life events that differentiate the experiences of immigrants from those of the majority Western culture.

Therapeutic Issues

The *Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees* (Beiser et al., 1998) identified specific additional factors that affect the mental health of immigrants and refugees. These include how the family manages the cultural transition process, conflicts between traditional and Canadian gender roles, intergenerational conflict and disruption of social support networks. Therefore, the psychological impact of migration for immigrants is not exclusively due to the migration process, but is compounded by the discrepancy between one's own culture of origin and the culture of the host country (Sue & Sue, 2003). It is this latter phenomenon of being an "ethnic minority" that has received recent attention in North American literature and has been identified as a "major life stressor" and a risk factor for the development of various psychological difficulties (DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Some of these issues are discussed in the sections to follow.

Conflicting value systems. A common value in Western culture is the emphasis on individualism and a separate existence of the self, which becomes the focus of therapeutic change. However, as Hofstede (1980) identified, many cultures and societies around the world have a collectivistic view of identity, and perceive individualism as a hindrance to overall development. Sue and Sue (1999) state that "almost all ethnic minority groups place greater value on families, historical lineage, interdependence among family members and submergence of self for the good of the family" (p. 104). This differing value system becomes a contentious issue for families through the process of acculturation as individual members begin to redefine their personal roles and values in reforming their ethnic identity. For young immigrant children this process can be particularly difficult given that they are constructing their ethnic identities for the first time, while others in the family are struggling with re-definition. Hence, young children may not have consistency of "family norms" or role models within this system to guide their process of identity formation. An additional conflict in value structure that often occurs in immigrant families is related to gender equality, which is demonstrated for the most part in Western value systems. Women and girls from traditionally patriarchal cultures tend to be more willing to accept the new value system providing them with more choice and empowerment within their family (Sue & Sue, 2003) especially when they are likely to experience a sense of equality and independence in their classrooms. Hence, as value structures become discrepant among family members, an increase in family conflict or feelings of distance or separation from one's own family may occur (Baptiste, 1993).

Biculturalism. Immigrants living in North America often develop two different cultural traditions that are passed along to future generations, which can be especially challenging for very young immigrants or children of immigrants born in the host country. Biculturalism influences family structures, communications and dynamics, and overall functioning. Biculturalism need not be a negative circumstance if the cultural norms from home and host countries are in relative alignment (Sue & Sue, 2003). However, the greater the discrepancy, the harder it is to maintain both cultural perspectives. This may lead members of the family to choose assimilation (i.e., complete acceptance of host culture and rejection of old values and ethnic identity) or marginalization (i.e., complete rejection of host culture and adherence to home culture and identity) (Berry, 2003). Again, as with the discrepancy in value structures, discrepancy in family members' levels of biculturalism increases family conflict and dysfunction (McGoldrick & Giordano, 1996).

Most immigrants who arrive to Canada view themselves as belonging to a cultural or ethnic population other than "Canadian", and tend to attempt to integrate their unique cultural heritage with Canadian ways (Berry, 2003). On the one hand, this sense of belonging can provide an incredible resource for many immigrants who are able to maintain a strong connection with their cultural origin upon migration. On the other hand, having a sense of belonging to an ethnic minority population within a majority culture can be isolating and challenge one's sense of support and belonging in the new country. Thus, both home and host country connections influence the establishment of ethnic identity in the new society (Berry).

According to McGoldrick and Giordano (1996), most people are unaware or ambivalent about their cultural and ethnic identification or the process of establishing a "cultural or ethnic identity". That is, this is not set out as a conscious endeavor by new immigrants. Although the overall process may occur relatively unconsciously, there are a variety of external factors that may direct this process for an individual. For example, those families and individuals most exposed to prejudice and discrimination are more likely to internalize negative feelings about their ethnic identity. Conversely, if people are valued for their differences and a particular ethnic identity reinforces self-image or group belonging, such as the high achieving minority stereotype of Chinese Canadians, the result is often a positive sense of ethnic identity development (Sue & Sue, 2003). Similarly, the geographic region of settlement and number of visible minorities residing may influence the level of acceptance of a particular ethnic group by the majority Canadian culture. Overall, researchers agree that the development of positive ethnic and racial identity for new immigrants is essential for developing a healthy personal and group identity that supports overall psychological functioning (McGoldrick & Giordano; Sue & Sue). Ultimately, it is the *sense of belonging*, to any culture that becomes critical for development (Sue & Sue). As mentioned earlier, this may be of particular challenge to young immigrant children whose sense of belonging and ethnic identity development may be compromised by the myriad of changes and acculturation process preoccupying adult members of their family system.

Ethnicity and language. Having a common language often supports the maintenance of traditional cultural norms as well as the identification and bonding with members of similar cultural and ethnic populations. Studies in the field of sociolinguistics confirm that language conveys a wealth of information other than the primary content of the message including: place of origin and group membership (Sue & Sue, 1999). For immigrants, the maintenance of their first language while learning the language of the majority culture often supports the acculturation process and establishment of a positive bicultural identity. Unfortunately, learning the new host language often takes precedence over preserving the original language in order to survive economically and socially in the host culture (Baptiste, 1993). For children who are immersed in the school culture, the acquisition of the host language is critical to academic and social success and is strongly encouraged and supported by school staff and settlement agencies. This can be extremely confusing for young children in families where older generations, in an attempt to preserve culture, reject the acquisition of the new language and resent the loss of language in younger generations. This not only affects the personal development and identity of each member, but also the overall family structure and functioning. When a child in a family becomes the "expert" in the majority language, he or she often takes on the role of the interpreter or cultural liason, increasing his or her responsibility and role in the family system. Parents who are dependent on their child(ren) for accessing knowledge have reported significant personal and psychological difficulties (Guernina, 1993). Similarly, children who are relied upon as cultural or linguistic experts of the host culture may also feel significant role and identity confusion as well as personal distress.

Mental Health and Spirituality among Immigrants

The multiple life changes and challenges experienced by immigrant families may represent a significant source of stress in their lives. Stress has been defined as a multidimensional response to a perceived inequity between situational demands and personal coping resources (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Lazarus & Folkman, 2003). Personal coping resources encompass individual factors, including problem-solving skills, internal/external locus of control, attributional style, and spirituality and religion, as well as environmental factors, such as material assets and social supports (Folkman & Moskowitz). Cognitive appraisal plays a central role in both initiating and shaping the experience of stress. Extremely demanding situations may not be experienced as stressful by an individual who believes that he or she can cope with the situation or that he or she can access the resources needed to cope with the situation. Essentially, if increased life demands are perceived as a challenge that can be overcome, negative health consequences are minimized (Folkman & Moskowitz), as may be the case for many immigrants coping with adversity (Sue & Sue, 2003).

The health of Canadian immigrant children is currently being assessed through a national research initiative called the *New Canadian Children and Youth Study* (Metropolis website), following preliminary findings from the *National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth* (Health Canada, 1999). Initial findings from the survey are consistent with findings for immigrant adults, which suggest that overall, immigrant children have better health status and fewer mental and physical health concerns than their Canadian-born counterparts (Beiser et al., in press, as cited in Applied Research and Analysis Directorate). Thus, despite the multiple adverse life events and stressors previously outlined, immigrant children do not exhibit high rates of psychological distress (Health Canada), attesting to their resiliency and perceived coping abilities. Resiliency is used to describe three types of experiences: (a) *overcoming the odds*, involving cases where individuals from high risk groups show better than expected developmental outcomes, (b) *sustaining competence under pressure*, describing cases where positive adaptation is maintained despite significant life adversity, and (c) *recovering from trauma*, involving successful adjustment after an intensely stressful event, such as exposure to violence or the death of a family member (Masten, 1994; Masten, 2001). Immigrant children may experience any or all of these components of resiliency in inhibiting the manifestation of psychological distress.

The positive adaptation of immigrant populations in Canada as referred to above, has been identified as the "healthy immigrant effect" (Beiser et al., 1998). This effect is attributed to three factors: (1) the screening process for immigrants applying for residence in Canada which uses health status as a selection criterion, (2) the positive effects of optimism and expectancies about a better life in Canada among immigrants or asylum seekers, and (3) the unique coping strategies of immigrant groups, such as cultural community support and culture-specific resources including religion and spirituality (Health Canada, 1999).

Various protective factors may reduce the likelihood of experiencing stress and mental health problems in new immigrant families despite significant adversity. For example, if immigrant families perceive poverty due to underemployment to be a transient state that will eventually be overcome, this optimism may contribute to resiliency. The negative effects of poverty on an immigrant family's mental and physical health may also be mitigated by factors such as parental valuing of education and literacy, and family motivation to succeed (Guarnaccia & Lopez, 1998). Similarly, social support from one's ethnic community may moderate the stress of adverse life events (Health Canada, 1999). Connection to settlement services may also assist immigrant families in identifying local resources and in meeting resettlement needs (Victoria, Settlement Counsellor, personal communication, February 16, 2003). This connection may function as instrumental support and help immigrants establish such necessities as their housing, employment and establishment of material assets.

Research also suggests that a critical and natural source of strength and resilience for immigrant families is the personal resource of religion and spirituality (Richards & Bergin, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2003). In general, people who are religiously and spiritually devout, but not extremists, tend to enjoy better physical health and psychological adjustment, and lower rates of pathological social conduct than those who are not (Benson, 1996; Koeing, 1997, Pargament, 1997; Richards & Bergin, 1997). The inclusion of both religion and spirituality addresses the benefits of having established beliefs and ideologies that are upheld within and outside of the formal context of religious practice and rituals.

In a review of the literature, Richards and Bergin (1997) summarized findings related to religiosity and spirituality, and mental health. With regards to ethnic minority and immigrant populations, findings generally demonstrate that: (a) those who engage in religious coping such as individual or communal prayer, congregation and reading sacred writings tend to adjust better to crises and adversity, (b) they have better physical and mental health status than those who do not identify themselves as spiritual or religious, (c) those who maintain religious commitment and active involvement experience less depression, are less likely to divorce, are less likely to use or abuse drugs, and are more likely to display morally appropriate behaviours (e.g., empathy, altruism), and (d) those who understand their existence and life events to have spiritual meaning (as defined by the individual) adjust better to life adversity and experience less overall life stress. Additional research on the effects of spirituality is discussed in the functions of spirituality section in the literature review to follow.

A report based on the 1996 *National Population Health Survey* speaks to the transmission of immigrant family religious beliefs to their children (Canadian Council for Social Development, retrieved from the world wide web, February 2, 2005). Researchers found that immigrant youth tend to be more active in religious organizations, compared to their Canadian-born counterparts. More than one-third (35%) of recent immigrant children and youth and children of new immigrants attend religious services at least once a week. In contrast, 23% of young people who have been in Canada for 10 years or more attend religious services weekly, as do 16% of Canadian-born youth. Furthermore, recent immigrant youth attach greater importance to religion; nearly three-quarters reported that religion plays an important role in their lives, compared to half of Canadian-born youth. Unfortunately, no specific research regarding younger immigrant children in Canada is available at this time. However, for most recent immigrants, religious organizations help them to establish a social network, and many religious institutions offer activities for children and youth, with some even offering services in languages other than English or French (Canadian Council for Social Development). This study emphasizes the importance of religious attendance and rituals in the lives of immigrant youth, which are considered to be aspects of spirituality, which is a much broader construct.

According to a review of the literature, Pargament (1999) explains that the definitions of the terms religion and spirituality are evolving and that spirituality tends to include religious beliefs and practice as well as individual expressions of faith and personal meanings that may better inform an individual's worldview. Thus, it is important to further understand the role of spirituality, which includes religion, in the lives of immigrant children. The literature review that follows will define spirituality and discuss the possible functions of spiritual understanding and experiences in people's lives.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Construct of Spirituality

The origin of the word psychology literally translates from Latin as "study of the soul" and is rooted in theories of philosophy and theology. William James, often considered the "father" of psychology, found it natural and necessary to study religious and spiritual experiences in understanding the complexity of human behaviour (James, 1902, 1961). Over time however, the study of human experience increasingly developed into a field of scientific inquiry based on measurable and reliable outcomes, which subsequently rejected the study of spirituality and religion for a number of decades. The alienation that has existed between the mental health professions and spirituality for most of the 20th century appears to be ending, allowing for the evolution of a more spiritually open *zeitgeist* enabling and even encouraging spiritual and religious inquiry in mainstream mental health research (Richards & Bergin, 1997; Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Benson, 2006).

The study of spirituality has also evolved out of the growing necessity to further understand human interrelationships. Global migration, communication, and partnership have increased significantly demanding a deeper understanding of cultural differences. For example, the Canadian Space Agency (CSA) held a recent conference in Banff, Alberta (May, 2003) to discuss research needed for the proposed future international endeavour of a "mission to Mars". Of all of the various fields of research presented, psychology was the most represented and given the highest priority at the conference. As described by the scientists present, what is needed is a deep understanding of long term cross-cultural relationships, specifically regarding existential views about space travel, life beyond earth, and coping strategies for long-term isolated missions. The researches specifically recognized the need to develop a cross-cultural spiritual perspective of space travel in order to support and sustain an international mission.

The study of spirituality has also re-appeared as a genuine area of human experience and development across other mainstream areas of scientific inquiry such as anthropology, sociology, medicine, and nursing. This resurgence of interest within the scientific community has demanded a more comprehensive and objective definition of spirituality within and across disciplines. Despite this demand, it is immediately clear upon review of the spirituality literature that no uniform definition of spirituality exists. Even within a single discipline, such as psychology, researchers continually attest that due to the subjective and individual nature and experience of spirituality, no exact or pervasive definition of spirituality can be identified (Hill et al., 2000; Richards & Bergin, 2000; Pargament, 1999). Nye (1999) further argues that perhaps it should not:

> Attempts to define (spirituality) closely, and derive an adequate 'operational definition' can be sure of one thing: misrepresenting spirituality's complexity, depth and fluidity. Spirituality is like the wind – though it might be experienced, observed and described, it cannot be 'captured – we delude ourselves to think otherwise, either in the design of research or in analytical conclusions (p. 58).

The elusiveness of the construct of spirituality is common across all disciplines. As Nye (1999) expressed, the experience and ultimate expression of spirituality is unique to the knower and to his or her own interpretations. Furthermore, given the emergent nature of this filed of inquiry and the diversity of cultural and individual perspectives and experiences of spirituality, it may be premature to propose that a single definition could adequately capture this idea. How one understands and defines spirituality is dependent on one's overarching framework, or set of beliefs and values, which Sue and Sue (2003) refer to as one's worldview.

Despite the elusiveness and complexity of spirituality, several assessment measures have been created to objectively quantify "spirituality" and "religious experience" (Elias, 1991; Moncher & Josphson, 2004; Rícan, 2003; Sexon, 2003). However, the lack of statistical consistency and validity among these measures has further supported Nye's (1999) notion that any operational definition will likely misrepresent "spirituality's complexity, depth and fluidity" (p.58). Consequently, researchers have turned to qualitative methods of inquiry to better understand the meaning and experience of spirituality (Hill et al., 2000; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Richards & Bergin, 2000).

Given then, that spirituality is unique in expression and definition to each knower, are there at least common dimensions of spirituality that consistently emerge in the research? According to several reviews of the literature, there are common threads in how spirituality is conceptualized that tie this research together (Hill et al., 2000; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Benson, 2006). In a recent textbook entitled, the *"Handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence"*, the editors summarize these similarities (Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Benson, 2006). First, is the consistency of spirituality within individual and collective human experiences that have been documented throughout history and across cultures; furthermore, spirituality has often constituted a strong political force and influenced the evolution of nations and larger societies. Second, spirituality and spiritual experiences seems integrally tied to other areas of development and is often associated with optimal human functioning. Third, spirituality is relational; whether it be with oneself, with others, with nature, or with the perceived divine or transcendent. Fourth, spirituality encompasses feelings, acts and experiences, which can but do not necessarily have to draw on religious imagery, doctrine, symbols, or traditions. Fukuyama and Sevig (1999) further clarify that spirituality is recognized as a broader construct than religion and is unique but not necessary distinct from religiosity. Finally, spirituality is multidimensional and unique to the individual knower, even within a collective construct. Some of the dimensions of spirituality mentioned and the relation of spirituality and religion are explored further in the following sections.

Relationality

Spirituality has been described as a heightened awareness and felt sense of the existence of any or all of four types of unique and special relationships as mentioned above (Hay & Nye, 1998): Relationship between the self and God (or perceived divine being(s)/spirits), the self and other people, the self and the world (i.e., universe, nature or the environment), and consciousness of a relationship with oneself. According to Hay and Nye, the particular relationship(s) one chooses may be influenced by one's cultural beliefs, religious teachings, and/or lived experiences. There is no qualitative preference or hierarchy attributed to the different ways one chooses to relate, nor are the four relationships intended to be interpreted as stages or as a developmental process as is sometimes described in research on religious development or acquisition. Pargament (1999) further expands this notion of relationality and recognizes spirituality as a search for significance or meaning, as well as a search for the sacred or divine.

The relational component of spirituality is intrinsically tied to one's worldview and as stated, may be directly dictated or influenced by one's religious affiliation or cultural group membership. One's religious or spiritual orientation for example, may define the divine being(s) that believers perceive themselves to be in a relationship with as well as the nature of these relationships (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999). For example, in the religion of Islam, the divine being, known as Allah, is a benevolent creator external to the individual whose presence and mercy is accessible at all times, without condition (Smith, 1991). Every individual has a spiritual component of the self that is eternal and connected to the creator and all living beings. In the teachings of the Buddha, the relationality emphasized does not acknowledge a single or separated divine being, but rather a universal energy connecting all beings and life to one another. The belief that all life is connected frames one's choices and the understanding of the meaning, circumstances, and purpose of life itself. For Buddhists, there is no aspect of life that is not relational and therefore not spiritual (Richards & Bergin, 2000; Smith, 1991). Conversely, for Muslims, the spiritual being is an eternal component of oneself that can be accessed through prayer, meditation, and eventually death.

An example of spirituality not influenced by organized religion, but by cultural teachings, is evidenced among Aboriginal people. Sue and Sue (2003) explain how spirituality in Aboriginal communities is experienced as a feeling of unity with the land, nature, animals, and ancestral spirits. New Age spiritual thinking also offers a non-religious perspective on relationality. The emphasis on heightened self-awareness and self-knowledge through meditative practice and self-exploration is representative of a relationship with the divinity within one's self (Richards & Bergin, 2000).

Feelings, Acts, and Experiences

Spirituality is often described as involving feelings, acts, and/or experiences involving one or more of the relational connections described above (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Spirituality may consist of feelings involving a deep sense of devotion, love, faith and connection to nature, the universe, the self, to others or to whatever one may consider divine (Nye & Hay, 1996). Hay (1997) beautifully describes spirituality as the "potential to be much more deeply aware of both ourselves and of our intimate relationship with everything that is not ourselves" (p.9). Ploeger (1997) understands spirituality as an "unconscious longing for insight into our existence and for wholeness" (p.16). Říčan (2003) explains that spirituality may be associated with creativity, authentic inner experience(s), freedom of individual expression, and personal search. Additional research studies on spirituality report spiritual experiences that are often unexplainable or unique to the knower such as heightened or unique sensory experiences; these may include visions of spirits or light, hearing the voice of spiritual guidance, out-of-body occurrences, and experiences of the afterlife (Richards & Bergin, 2000; Sexon, 2004). Many of these experiences are documented across cultures are often sanctioned ideas and experiences of reality (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Regardless of how spirituality manifests in an individual's life, it is often understood as unique and significant to the knower. Říčan explains that spirituality encompasses "what individuals experience in their search for meaning or search for the sacred, plus the expressions of this experience in their declared opinions and activities" (p. 255).

The concept of spirituality may further involve religious or cultural rituals and/or solitary or congregational acts of worship (e.g., prayer, chanting, meditation or journaling) (Richards & Bergin, 2000). Cross and Livingstone (1998) define spirituality as "the exercises and beliefs which individuals or groups have with regard to their personal relationship with God" (p. 1532), including religious rituals and prayer, as well as one's moral and ethical values and beliefs. Similarly, Coles' (1990) understanding of children's spirituality includes value-based thinking, ethics, moral behaviour and moral choice-making. He describes acts of altruism and empathy as spiritual when they are reportedly guided by religious teachings or one's spiritual beliefs. Sexson (2004) expands this notion and explains that spirituality may reflect an individual's attempt to construct meaning in life; this active search for meaning can involve attempting to make sense of life events through spiritual rituals or contemplation of moral dilemmas.

The combination of relationality, feelings, acts, and experiences supports the idea that spirituality is best understood as an overarching framework that orients individuals to the world and perhaps provides meaning, direction and motivation for one's life (McIntosh, 1995; Pargament, 1997). In this way, spirituality may inform one's life-narrative and support sense-making of the meaning and purpose of life and one's own existence.

Spirituality and Religion

How individuals identify and understand their experiences across the relational, emotional, and behavioural dimensions of spirituality outlined above will likely be guided by their cultural identity, their exposure and adherence to religious teachings, and their overall worldview. Thus, each individual would determine whether they view or identify their own spirituality as exclusively spiritual, religious, both, or neither. As a consequence, there is the potential for great individual variability in conceptualizing and defining religion and spirituality and whether or not these are related, distinct or equitable concepts. This variability is acutely recognized across disciplines and has encouraged the need to distinguish between the two terms and among related concepts (e.g., hope, faith, morality, etc.).

Religion and spirituality are expressed in many ways and vary given one's cultural and geographic history. In a paper discussing the changing taxonomy of spirituality, Elias (1991) emphasized the individual variation in the use of spirituality by noting that the interpretation and definition of the term depended on the speaker and the cultural context of the speaker. The challenge of delineating spirituality as something separate and distinct from religion is well articulated in the literature. However, Hay and Nye (1998) provide a plausible starting place to understand these two terms:

> Knowledge *about* religion and the ability to use religious language is not the whole story when we are thinking about spirituality. It is important not to get caught into the assumption that spirituality can only be recognized in the use of a specialized religious language. I have spoken about the difficulty with almost all research on children's spiritual life, up to the very recent past, in that it has been focused on God-talk rather than spirituality. I have also presented a notion of spirituality as something biologically built into the human species, a holistic awareness of reality which is potentially found in every human being (p. 57).

In a recent chapter, Hay, Reich, and Utsch (2006) further elaborate that religion is best understood as (a) an evolved system of thought, feeling, and actions shared by a group as members' response to an object of devotion, (b) a code of ethics governing personal and social conduct, and, (c) a frame of reference relating individuals to their group and the universe (p.47). Hay et al. (2006) explain that the concept of spirituality adds to it the relational dimension of religiosity as well as the openness for multiple views and interpretations of divine experience. Religion, they argue, offers limited perspectives of the complexity of human development by often providing only one model of truth. Thus, Hay et al. recognize the importance of acknowledging religion within spirituality, but emphasizes that the distinction may lie in the rituals, traditions, and culture of religious practice rather than an innate sense of spirituality that is intertwined with human existence and all human experience.

In a study aimed at understanding popular culture's usage of the terms religion and spirituality, Zinnbauer et al. (1997) discovered that significant variability exists in how people use and understand the terms religion and spirituality. In his study of 305 individuals from a variety of religious and professional backgrounds, he asked participants to provide their own definitions of religiousness and spirituality. Three judges then analyzed the definitions resulting in thirteen emerging categories. Notably, no single category accounted for a majority of the definitions of either term, confirming the variability in personal interpretations of both these terms. Additionally, Zinnbauer found group differences between the clergy and nurses in their uses of the terms spirituality and religiousness. For example, clergy consistently used the term "formal/organized religion" to define both religion and spirituality, suggesting that the two terms were perceived as overlapping constructs. Conversely, the nurses' definitions of spirituality and religiosity were consistently different with very little overlap between the terms. Specifically, the nurses' in this study defined religion by formal and organized practices and rituals, whereas spirituality was associated with closeness to God and feelings of interconnectedness with nature and life.

In a large follow-up U.S. based survey, Zinnbauer and Pargament (1998) found a decline in the strength of mainline religious institutions over the past 25 years, as well as erosion in the public's confidence in religious leadership and its influence over public policy and political decision making. In addition, Roof (1993) found that 60% of the baby boomers he surveyed dropped out of active religious involvement for two or more years during the 1980s. Despite the reported decline in active participation in many religious denominations, those participants surveyed by both Zinnbauer et al. (1997) and Roof were no less "religious", but rather re-defined their practice of prayer, meditation, and congregation as "spiritual". Zinnbauer et al. explains that "during the same time period that mainline religious institutions declined, alternatives to traditional religious institutions as well as new, Eastern forms of faith under the label 'spirituality' have risen in popularity" (p.891). Thus, as spirituality has become differentiated from religiosity, for many individuals it has taken with it some of the elements historically associated with religion. This change in public perception and practice has resulted in narrow and less inclusive definitions of religion for many individuals (Hill, 2000; McSherry & Cash, 2004; Richards & Bergin, 2000).

According to Fukuyama and Sevig (1999) religious practice and spirituality are interconnected and intersect with the cultural dimensions and expression of each individual. After 10 years of qualitative research and case study work on adults from a variety of backgrounds, Fukuyama and Sevig suggest that spirituality be utilized to describe universal qualities and religion be understood as the "culture-specific expression of spirit". Sexson (2004) further emphasizes that spirituality is a broader concept than religiosity, which subsumes religion as a more discrete component. This distinction between religion and spirituality and view of spirituality as a broader more universal concept than religion is important for this study and in understanding the diversity of perspectives and practices that are often association with children's spirituality. Thus, for the purpose of this research, spirituality is best understood as a relational construct that may include one or all of the following: innate or constructed view of the divine or transcendent; personal search for meaning and/or sense-making, and; feelings, acts, and experiences connected to whatever one considers divine or transcendent.

Spirituality in Children

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1991) postulates that spirituality is a significant factor in children's lives. The Convention specifically acknowledges spiritual development as a category of human development and health worthy of rights protection. Article 27 recognizes "the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development" (p. 14). Article17 identifies the right of "access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health" (p. 8). Throughout this document, spirituality is recognized as an aspect of child development that is distinct from physical, cognitive, emotional, social and moral development.

Spiritual and religious traditions may play multiple roles in the lives of children such as framing how a child understands themselves and the world around them, providing a structure for moral development and decision-making, and aiding in their socialization to different ideals of personhood and behavior (Barnes et al., 2000). Spirituality may further frame children's understanding of social relations and the natural world and link their observations of daily life to the broader world, hence supporting their sense of individual purpose and meaning (Piechowski, 2001). In addition, spirituality and religion may influence children's ideas about sickness, suffering, coping, and healing, which has direct relevance to the well-being of children attempting to adjust to adverse life events (Kazdin, 2003).

Drawing a distinction between religion and spirituality in children may be difficult as the boundaries between the two concepts may be blurred in actual practice and conceptualization. Barnes et al. (2000) emphasize that children, depending on their age, may not make sharp distinctions between spirituality and religion. This has also been echoed by Coles (1990), who argues that spirituality in children is best understood within the context of culture and religious identity, which is consistent with Fukuyama and Sevig's (1999) identification of religion as a culturally formed expression of spirituality. These authors argue that children are unable to make the distinction between taught religious perspectives and their own experiences based on their developmental capacities, particularly cognitive, and their exposure to religious teachings and cultural behaviours. That is, a child who has been raised within a strong Catholic framework may understand their own spirituality within this framework primarily due to their early exposure and experience. Given this perspective, research in this area has largely considered the integrated assessment of spirituality and religious behaviour in children. Although alternatives to this approach have recently been proposed (Hart, 2003; Hay, Reich, & Utsch, 2006; Hay & Nye, 1998), it important to first understand children's spirituality in the context of religion and cultural upbringing.

Two of the best known researchers historically contributing to literature in children's spiritual development in the context of religious development include James Fowler (1981) and his stage theory of faith-development and Robert Coles (1990) whose qualitative interviews culminated into a seminal book entitled: "*The Spiritual Life of Children*". The important contributions from each of these authors are described next.

Fowler's Faith Development Theory

Fowler and his graduate students spent several years conducting semi-structured interviews with hundreds of individuals across developmental stages predominantly from Christian-based religious backgrounds. As a result of his expansive research, Fowler proposed a Faith Development Theory that was largely informed by cognitive development theories of Erik Erikson and Jean Piaget and the then growing moral development theory by Lawrence Kohlberg. Specifically, Fowler acknowledged the importance of cognitive development and maturation to his faith development theory. For example, Fowler asserted that a child who did not successfully master Erikson's first stage of trust versus mistrust (due to poor early attachment or early abuse or trauma) would always be challenged in their faith development. Similarly, an individual's stage of moral development and decision-making would directly affect their stage of faith development.

Recently, Fowler and Dell (2006) have expanded their definition of faith beyond specific religious practice or identification, to an inclusive term characterized as an "integral, centering process, underlying the formations of the beliefs, values, and meanings that gives direction to a person's life, links one to others creating a larger frame of reference, and supports one to deal with the challenges of daily life" (p.36). Fowler and Dell further explain that although the faith development theory is a stage based model and approximate corresponding ages are proposed, all individuals may not necessarily progress at the suggested ages and some may not move through every stage. In fact, according to Fowler (1981), most do not reach the last stage of faith development. However, this model does assume that each stage builds on the previous and works towards increased faith development and "perfection". The stages of Fowler's (1981) faith development theory as it pertains to childhood are described next.

(1) Intuitive/Projective Faith - The first stage typically describes a child from the ages of 2-7 years. This is a time of changing and growing, and a dynamic view of faith that is marked by the rise of imagination. According to Fowler, children at this stage do not have the kind of logic that makes possible or necessary the questioning of perceptions about faith presented by parents, cultural communities, or religious authorities. Therefore the child's mind is creative and open to possibilities of religion and faith-based explanations of life, death, creation, etc. Fowler emphasizes that the experiences and images that occur and take form at this stage have powerful and long-lasting positive and/or negative effects on the individual's conceptualization and utilization of faith. At this stage, children are able to express through verbal and non-verbal means their perceived attributes and roles of the divine or of other spiritual figures (e.g., angels) in their lives (Fowler & Dell, 2004). Fowler

purports that during this stage, children's cognitive egocentrism makes it difficult to take the perspective of others or differentiate their perspectives from those of others. As a result, Fowler explains that children in this developmental stage are not capable of understanding cause-and-effect or distinguishing between fantasy and factuality.

(2) Mythic/Literal Faith - In the second stage, children ages 7-11 develop a way of dealing with the world and start the meaning making process of their life narrative which often involves questioning and evaluating faith-based constructs. At this stage, children begin to criticize and evaluate their previous stage of imagination and fantasy and are able to articulate their own beliefs. Children may take religious or spiritual symbols (prayer space, rosary beads, photographs, idols, etc.) and myths at face value, though these may touch or move children to a deeper level of experiencing. Interestingly, Fowler and Dell (2006) also emphasize that children may express multiple religious and spiritual beliefs or perspectives, even when beliefs are contradictory. Children's views may also appear confusing and diffused, rather than reflecting a unitary religious or spiritual belief system (Fowler & Dell, 2004).

(3) Synthetic/Conventional Faith - This stage typically begins around ages 12-13 and is marked by the beginning of Piaget's formal operational thinking, which involves metacognition or the ability to think about one's own thinking. This is a time when the early adolescent is typically engaged in forming their own identity while also preoccupied by evaluations and feedback from significant people in his or her life. Fowler refers to this stage as synthetic, in the sense that it involves a pulling together of one's valued images and beliefs into a personalized religious identity that is heavily influenced by environmental input. This is also a stage where religious ideas expand to shape and explain moral dilemmas. One of the hallmarks of this stage is that it tends to compose images of God as extensions of interpersonal relationships, where God is often experienced as a friend or companion. According to Fowler, this is the stage when the truly relational aspect of faith is formed. As well, children are now able to explain and provide a rationale for their belief systems and how these impact their behaviours (Fowler & Dell, 2004).

Fowler's (1981) final three stages are reached in late adolescence and adulthood including stages of: (4) Individuative/Projective Faith, (5) Conjunctive Faith, and (6) Universalizing Faith. As stated earlier, these last stages may not occur for all individuals as they are characterized by a personal spiritual search within a framework of faith where one works towards an integration of beliefs and practices into all aspects of one's life, eventually leading one towards enlightenment. According to Fowler and Dell (2006), the last stage in particular, applies to all individuals regardless of faith, religious, or cultural background. However, in describing this stage, Fowler and Dell speak about the individual grounding him or herself in "Holiness" and emanating "God's love", citing examples such as Mother Teresa and Dr. Martin Luther King. Although this model intends to be inclusive, ideals of "holiness" and belief in God are not necessarily applicable to all individuals and limit the construct of faith to a possible manifestation of spirituality, rather than a conceptual synonym.

Within Fowler's (1981; Fowler & Dell, 2004; Fowler & Dell, 2006) framework, children are seen as becoming capable of increasingly abstract and multi-perspective religious thinking as they grow older, and are ultimately more equipped to understand and reflect on their own spiritual development. Fowler explains that self-reflection and perspective-taking towards one's faith is critical and necessary to reach higher levels of development. The greatest limitation in Fowler's stage-based model is the assumption that children are *developing* where their faith is intrinsically tied to their development and cognitive capacity until they reach adulthood. Fowler's theory presumes that the objective of children's faith acquisition is to master faith as demonstrated by adults, likely their parents. From this perspective all childhood experiences of spirituality, religion and faith are viewed as progressive, primitive, incomplete or immature. This view of faith as stage-based, versus process or experience-based, may limit an authentic understanding of childhood spiritual experiences and spirituality in children. The assumption that spirituality *progresses* throughout one's lifetime and cannot be completely experienced by a child has been emphatically challenged (Best, 1996; Hart, 2003; Hay & Nye, 1998; Hoffman, 1998; Piechowski, 2001). In fact, Fowler and Dell (2006) acknowledge the limitations of the faith development theory as a theory of spirituality in children, but remain encouraged by the utility of this model for use in the religious and secular education and curriculum development for children and adolescents.

Robert Coles: The Spiritual Life of Children

In a review of research on childhood spirituality, Piechowski (2001) concludes that "genuine spiritual experiences are accessible to children and that the quality and depth of such experiences challenge developmental theories that put absolute limits on children's conceptual and experiential capacities" (p.1). Specifically, Piechowski reports that three types of children's spiritual experiences have been identified the literature. First, on the basis of their own experiences, children realize that adults around them are "spiritually ignorant". This happens when children report having various experiences not witnessed or experienced by adults, such as lucid dreams, near death experiences, spontaneous healing and spiritual contact. Second, children have reported awareness of their identity beyond the physical self and beyond one lifetime. This has been found in studies of children or guardians of children reporting out-of-body experiences, feelings of oneness with nature, and timelessness. Third, children know or discover methods of achieving their own state of heightened consciousness through spontaneous meditation and self-soothing techniques. Child psychiatrist and professor at Harvard University, Robert Coles (1990), was one of the first to document children's spiritual experiences and ideas such as those described in Piechowski's review. A description of his findings is presented next.

In the early years of his career, Dr. Robert Coles became intrigued by the observed psychological strength and resilience he witnessed among children from poor socioeconomic backgrounds residing in the southern United States. Through his interactions with these children, he began to document their mature views on life and strong moral values. This discovery inspired his research of children in the face of adversity, which resulted in a three volume book series entitled: Children of Crisis (1967) for which he received the Pulitzer Prize. In these and his subsequent books, Coles' discussed the strength and surprising sophistication of children's faith, morality, self-awareness, humanitarianism, and humility. These attributes were further explored in a later book entitled, "The Spiritual Life of Children" (Coles, 1990). In this book, Coles compiled results from over 500 interviews he conducted with children ranging from ages 5 through 13 years from a variety of first and third world nations.

Through his research, Coles (1990) discovered a unique spiritual world of children that did not conform to existing developmental or stage-based models. That is, children disclosed to Coles perspectives that questioned the bounds of existing developmental psychological theory, particularly cognitive bounds and the access to abstract and intuitive thinking. In addition to his results, Coles' method was also unconventional for his time: Coles initiated classroom discussions by asking children to express their beliefs and understandings about God and their meanings of religion and religious practices. He also asked general existential questions and facilitated the discussion to support children's views and impressions on such matters. Coles reported that he facilitated and recorded the discussions that children would have with one another in the classroom settings.

According to Coles, the children's descriptions defined a qualitatively different and important dimension of childhood that he and others did not expect. Through general discussions about life and creation and specific inquiries about God, angels, and spirits, Coles was able to access a deep sense of awareness about children's own spirituality and capture their ability to express their own unique interpretations. Coles concluded that the children he interviewed, regardless of cultural origin had a clear sense of their spiritual identity and could discuss and share their experiences, feelings, and thoughts through conversations and pictures. He found that children were willing to discuss their own beliefs and curiosities, and that the depth of their search for spiritual meaning and answers was significant in their lives. As such, in presenting his results, Coles provided little interpretation and as often as possible, he tells the story from the perspective of the children in the group discussions. Coles explains the importance and power of the children's spiritual narratives being heard and documented.

Although Coles' (1990) research sparked additional research and theory development in the area of children's spirituality, very little research has been done to assess children's individual spiritual experiences and conceptualizations from their own perspective or how children utilize their spirituality in daily life. These were recognized in Coles' work and identified as critical areas of future research. Specifically, Coles' research which spanned over many years was often conducted in religious classroom settings (e.g., Sunday school), where significant adult religious figures and teachers were often present during the interview sessions. Thus, as many of the children in his research utilized religious language, symbols, and pictures to express their spirituality, it is possible that they may have been influenced by the setting of the interview as well as the presence of their religious leadership. In addition, children in this or any other group setting may have been influenced or inhibited by one another's explanations and depictions, which would make it difficult to intimately explore and expose individual variations of spirituality among the children. Interestingly, the utilization of religious settings and the presence of religious leadership in his research would not be considered a limitation by Coles. Throughout his publications on the subject, Coles stresses the importance of researching children's spirituality within the context of a religious framework and cultural upbringing. He explains that children's own spirituality is formed and framed by their religious upbringings and cannot be understood or studied without this context.

Since Coles' original book, very little research was dedicated to understanding children's spirituality directly. Instead, the focus of research shifted to children's spiritual development, specifically, the fostering of children's spirituality within a religious framework. Research interest in this area was initiated by religious educators in the Southern United States and mainstream educators in the United Kingdom. Both geographic regions were interested in facilitating spirituality in children. Education in the UK adopted policies on children's rights from the UN and declared "spirituality" as a unique area of child development for which the schools would be responsible for supporting. This led to a plethora of research over the last decade attempting to understand, define, and encourage children's spiritual development. For the most part, adult questionnaires in religiosity were adapted to assess children's spirituality (Hill & Hood, 1999). Unfortunately, these questionnaires focused on adult-based conceptions of spirituality and religious practice and included items such as frequency of attendance to religious institutions, practice of religious rituals such as prayer, and beliefs about God and the afterlife. Many of these questionnaires did not reflect constructs sensitive to the religious diversity that exists in a multicultural context, nor did they draw on cross-cultural theories of child development or spirituality (Greenfield & Cocking, 1994). In recognition of these limitations, several authors initiated research to understand children's spiritual development and spirituality exclusively, as discussed in the following sections.

Spiritual Versus Religious Development in Children

In a recent chapter, Hay, Reich, and Utsch (2006) describe spiritual development in children as a different construct from religious development and regard spirituality as a genuine an innate process of human development. The authors of the chapter argue that a distinction between religious and spiritual development in children is warranted based on our current understanding and use of the two constructs. Firstly, the authors state that religious development across cultural frameworks does not provide specific explanations or coping strategies for individuals across all developmental stages of human experience. Specifically, young children's developmental needs and concerns are not considered in most religious teachings, such as existential explanations for "where we come from", "where will we go" and "who we are". Religious understanding for these concepts often requires life experiences and deep contemplation that typically only comes with adulthood. The authors point out that even within the context of a religious framework, as seen in Coles' research, children create individual perspectives and interpretations from their traditional teachings in order to cope with and understand their current life experiences. It is in this gap between their life experiences and religious development that children create their own meaning. It is this meaning-making that can be understood as children's spiritual development.

Secondly, Hay, Reich, and Utsch (2006) make a further distinction between religious and spiritual development in children. They address the issue that religion (e.g., beliefs, practices, and maturity) is often considered to be an acquired process of development leading to the eventual acquisition of higher order functioning and enlightenment. Rather, spirituality is considered an "inbuilt feature of the human species that develops from the beginning of an individual's life" (p. 47). Similarly, Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude (2003) define spiritual development as:

> The process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is imbedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred. It is the developmental "engine" that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and contribution (p. 205).

In both definitions, the authors emphasize the utility and power of spirituality to transform, understand, guide, and direct one's life choices and experiences at all stages of development. Because views of spirituality are not bound to specific experiences or dogma, individual expressions are implied. To better understand children's spirituality, a presentation of current research in this area is explored next.

Relational Consciousness

An interpretative framework for understanding children's spiritual experiences that is receiving general acceptance across the literature is proposed by Hay and Nye (1998). They suggest that children have a spiritual inclination that is expressed as "*relational consciousness*". This construct is defined as "an intentional and natural process of relating to the world, to all things animate and inanimate, to others, including a divine other, and to the self" (pp. 119–124). Hay and Nye describe two patterns of relational consciousness:

1. An unusual level of consciousness or perceptiveness, relative to other passages of conversation spoken by the child, related to sensory and emotional experiences unexplainable by typical human sensory functioning.
2. Conversation expressed in a context of how the child relates to the material world, him/herself, other people, and God (pp. 119–124).

Hay and Nye (1998) classified this relational consciousness across four different types of relationships: (a) the relationship between the self and God, (b) the relationship between self and other people, (c) the relationship between self and the world, and (d) children's consciousness of a relationship with themselves. Their approach is based on interviews with school children (under the age of ten) in the United Kingdom. Their model uses three sensitivities: awareness-sensing, mystery-sensing and value-sensing, to describe their view of a child's spiritual capabilities. Nye and Hay (1996) theoretically describe these categories as presented in Table 1.

Table I: Categories of Spiritual Sensitivity in Children (adapted from Nye & Hay, 1996)

Awareness Sensing	Here and Now	Transfixed by the moment, absence of marked time (past and future) symbolical or literal
	Tuning	Profound sensitivity and empathy to the ebb and flow of the present moment
	Flow	Concentrated attention by giving in to the influence of outside management (e.g., nature, music, etc.)
	Focusing	Awareness of the felt sense of the moment
Mystery Sensing	Awe and Wonder	Fascination or fear with a given experience.
	Imagination	To conceive what is beyond the known or obvious
Value Sensing	Delight and Despair	Purity and self-sufficiency of the emotion, transcending any particular context
	Ultimate Goodness	Pure delight and unconditional love for the present circumstance
	Meaning	The need to establish identity, meaning, and self

According to Hay (2000), the development of relational consciousness is critical to the spiritual development of a child. Hay explains that the deepest center or spirit of human kind is the collective and asserts that Western models of individualism inhibit and suppress the innate spiritual connection most children possess as they age through life. Similarly, in a popular new age book, "The Four Agreements" author Don Miguel Ruiz (1997) theorizes that we are born with complete awareness of our self, our spiritual origin and our oneness with all life. Ruiz further states that children are deeply aware of this truth without effort because they are not yet completely conditioned to the normative views of spirituality perpetuated by society which he terms, "illusions of the planet". He argues that as children become "domesticated" to societal rules and expectations by adult teachers, they are unable to sustain their unique spiritual awareness and instead begin to accept the societal rules exclusively as their own reality. Given that most existing research on children's spirituality is obtained through retrospective reports by adults, or by parents, the research is inherently limited and most likely contains predominantly societal and religious norms rather than children's unique spiritual experiences (Piechowski, 2001; Hart, 2003; Hoffman, 1998).

Examples of relational consciousness in children have been provided in various studies. A few examples will be reviewed in the following passages along with the methods used to establish them.

> Mark and his eight-year-old daughter, Miranda, were at a quiet beach one warm, sunny day. Miranda soon wandered into the soft and steady waves pulsing against the beach. She stood in the water up to her waist, just moving back and forth with the waves…It was nearly an hour and a half before she came out of the water, absolutely glowing and peaceful. She sat down next to her father without a word. After a few minutes, he managed gently to ask what she had been doing. "I was the water", she said softly (Hart, 2003, p. 47).

This statement reflects a felt sense of unity with the natural environment and addresses Hay and Nye's (1996) description of "awareness sensing". The information was obtained through an interview with the father. It is not known how Miranda would have described this experience or the meaning it held for her, or whether additional spiritual experiences occurred simultaneously.

Another childhood experience of unity with the environment is recalled by an adult in Hoffman's (1992) interview study:

> I found myself standing at the beach alone. The sea touched the sky. Breathing with the waves, I entered their rhythm. Suddenly there was a channelling of energy: the sun, the wind, the sea were going right through me. A door opened, and I became the sun, the wind, and the sea. There was no "I" anymore. "I" had emerged with everything else. All sensory perceptions had become one. Sound, smell, taste, touch, shape –all melted into a brilliant light. The pulsating energy went right through me and I was part of this energy. My parents found me transfixed on the beach and thought that I had suffered a heat stroke. So they kept me in bed, in the dark, for a couple of days (Hoffman, 1992, p. 38-39).

The participant was recalling a spiritual experience when she was 5 years of age and was an adult at the time of the interview.

In Hart's (2003) book describing interviews addressing children's spirituality, an example of consciousness between a relationship between the self and divine beings or ancestors was reported by the following adult male participant:

> The great visions of Native American elder Black Elk began at the age of five in a moment of awe as he walked through a "rainbow doorway" into a tepee. "I saw six old men sitting in a row" he related. "The oldest spoke, 'your grandfathers all over the world are having a council and they have called you here to teach you." Each proceeded to give him a gift of power and healing for his people in the times ahead. He was unconscious for twelve days after the vision and nearly died (Hart, 2003, p.13).

The adult's recollection represents the "mystery sensing" spiritual sensitivity described by Nye and Hay (1996), which involves imagining an experience beyond the known or obvious. Again, speaking to the participant when he was five years of age may have provided more information about the meaning of the experience at the time for him. Speaking to children about their experience within their developmental stage may further allow for an informed and integrated understanding of children's overall conceptions of spirituality and the role it plays in their lives as children.

The following quote was recorded by a parent observing her child's dialogue in Hart's (2003) book on children's spirituality. The quote addressed the value sensing component of Nye and Hay's (1996) description of relational consciousness. This reflects the process of self-identification and meaning of self.

> A six year old girl spoke to her mom about air: "I am not my brain, I am nothing. [She then pointed outside herself.] I am like all this…air. I was never anything before. I came from nothing, I came from air. You know how I know I am air? I know because that is what I was before I was born. That's where I came from" (Hart, 2003, p. 102).

All of the examples provided in this section have been collected either through parents or by adults recollecting childhood experiences. Although the examples provided clearly establish children's capacity for various types of spiritual experiences, it is not known whether the children themselves would identify these experiences as spiritual or connect them to their overall understanding of spirituality and the role it plays in their lives given their stage of development.

Few studies have directly or indirectly assessed children's ideas about spirituality and spiritual beliefs. These are presented next.

To examine children's beliefs about God, Pnevmatikos (2002) asked 132 children age 6-10 years from Catholic and Greek Orthodox religious backgrounds to draw two pictures, one of their own house and another that depicted "the house where God lives". The researcher found similarities in the two drawings, with the exception of additional features in God's house such as, a manger for Jesus and the gates of heaven. In interpretation of the children's drawings, Pnevmatikos concluded that children view God as "human-like" and imagine that he likely lives on Earth among the children. Although this is one possible interpretation of the children's drawings, the researcher did ask for a picture of "God's house", which is a socially constructed idea, rather than asking the children to draw where God might live, for example. Furthermore, the researcher did not interview the children directly about their drawings or ask them about their own ideas about God.

Also in attempt to understand children's concepts of God, researchers conducted a study with 48 Mayan children ages 4-7 years to assess their attribution of false-beliefs to both humans and to God (Knight, Sousa, Barrett, & Atran, 2004). In this study, Children were shown a pair of shorts placed in a culture-specific container usually used to store tortillas. When asked what a human-looking doll might think is in the container, a significantly high number of children reported "tortillas"; conversely, when the children were asked what "God" might think was in the container, a significantly higher number of children reported, "shorts". Researchers concluded that children are able to attribute different beliefs to God that are not necessarily based on their perception of humans and that these beliefs may include that of an all-knowing God. As with the previous study described, children were not interviewed directly about their spiritual beliefs or concepts of God.

In a third study, researchers assessed individual's concepts of God across three developmental age groups: preschoolers, third-graders, and college students (Wenger, 2001). A total of 161 individuals participated in a semi-structured interview and were asked 5 open-ended questions designed to indirectly assess spiritual beliefs. For example, participants were asked about the reason Earth has seasons, reasons for illness, and possible reasons for the existence of racial and ethnic diversity. Based on thematic analysis of participant's responses, Wenger (2001) concluded that spiritual beliefs increase in complexity and sophistication with age and that young children tend to view life circumstances concretely. Wenger did not ask any of the participants about their understanding of spirituality or God directly, nor was the intention of his study known to the participants. Thus, it is likely that younger children would not have deeper, philosophical answers to these questions, but rather concrete rationale or theories. Also the framing of his interview questions may not necessarily be answered through one's spiritual beliefs, but rather reflect social learning or religious teachings.

Overall, studies assessing children's concepts of God have not interviewed children specifically about their own beliefs and have not included other elements of spirituality that may not involve God concepts. From Hay and Nye's research (1998), it is critical to investigate children's capacity for spirituality beyond religious framework of God-concepts or methodologies that encourage socially constructed views of the divine and spiritual. However, many researchers argue that young children are not capable of a deeper perspective or experience of spirituality. Interestingly, an investigation of developmental research and theories of children provides support for children's capacity for unique spiritual concepts, experiences, and beliefs and for their ability to communicate their spirituality through direct and indirect methods. This is reviewed in the section to follow.

Developmental Support for Children's Spirituality

Existing theories of development provide support for children's innate ability to engage in and understand spiritual experience and to identify spiritual components as meaningful in their lives.

Theories of self. Early theories of self and perceptions of self-awareness suggested that children learn about themselves through increased knowledge and understanding of their environment creating increased distinction between self and other. Selman (1980) developed a five-stage model of children's development of self-awareness. According to Selman's stages, infants begin with an understanding of their physical existence, but do not display an awareness of "separate psychological existence". By age one, Selman posited that the child begins to separate cognition from behaviour, but maintains the belief that inner thoughts and feelings are directly represented in outward appearances and behaviours. Similarly, in Mahler's (1975) theory of self development, her first stage is characterized by what she describes as the "symbiotic phase", where the infant functions as if he or she and the caretaker are in a state of "undifferentiated union". The child does not know or experience a distinct form of self apart from his or her interpersonal environment or connections. As in Selman's theory, Mahler describes that over time, children develop a sense of differentiation from the caregiver. Mahler describes that the onset of this phase causes "anxiety and fear" in the child, since it moves him or her from the original experience of life. Bowlby (1951) further explains that the starting point of life is a state of psychological fusion with the caregiver and the natural environment that weakens with maturity as the child develops self-identity. Infants do not discriminate between the self and any person in their vicinity and will try to orient to that person, grasp and reach, babble, smile, and track the movements of the person with their eyes.

Across all of these developmental models of self-awareness, the authors describe children that are extremely connected and unified with their environment, and with other people. This innate capacity children are born with does change over time and with age and eventually develops into an increased sense of self and discrimination of self from others. The original state of children in developmental models directly parallels the definition of spirituality described in terms of relational consciousness – the awareness that all life is connected. From this view then, children not only have the capacity for relational consciousness, but likely find it easier to access than adults.

The ideas presented in theories of self are supported by the work of Harrison (2000). She observed seven children ages 10 months to eight years and interviewed their parents based on logs they kept of daily interactions with their children. Following qualitative analysis of the parent logs, Harrison established several common themes of spiritual awareness that emerged. Among the emerging themes, children demonstrated a connection and remarkable sensitivity to others, particularly a need to reduce the pain and suffering of others, as well as a connection to nature. For example, Jake at the age of 10 months was observed by his mother repeatedly crawling over to retrieve the pacifier of his younger cousin to appease her distress. When her anguish did not subside, Jake sought out the support of his mother by calling her to aid his young cousin (Harrison). Harrison described this empathic urge as a sense of spiritual connection and "symbiosis" with others.

Cognitive and social development. Jean Piaget (1952) is among the most influential researchers in the field of child development and is reputed for his theoretical conceptualization of the acquisition of knowledge and reasoning. Piaget's research provides a rich understanding of a child's verbal abilities and cognitive framework. He proposed that the thinking process will develop through each of four stages until a child can think logically. Piaget suggested that children's thinking does not develop entirely smoothly; instead, there are certain points at which it "takes off" and moves into completely new areas and capabilities. He saw these transitions as taking place at about 18 months-2 years, 7 years, and at 11 or 12 years. Piaget believed that before each stage is reached, regardless of intellectual capacity, children are not capable of understanding things in ways characteristic of the future stage.

(1) Sensorimotor Stage (birth to 2 years) - During this stage, infants mainly make use of senses and motor capabilities to experience the environment. For instance, if infants cannot see or touch an object, they stop trying to find it. Once infants develop the capability to recognize that a hidden object still continues to exist, they start searching for it. The key feature of this stage is that a child thinks only by doing or experiencing (Piaget, 1952).

(2) Pre-operational Stage (2 – 7 years) - At this developmental stage, children start to understand their environment through symbols, such as language and letters to represent objects. For instance, the child understands the word "apple" although a real apple is not seen. However, a child at this stage still learns from concrete evidence and personal experience, rather than abstract logic and thinking. A child at this stage is also unaware of another person's perspective, and exhibits individualized and egocentric thought and language. Furthermore, children at this stage are likely to center on only one dimension of an event and ignore other details. As well, children concentrate more on the static features of an event rather than on the transformations from one state to another. Last, children in this stage will see some relationships between particular cases while no logical similarities

appear to exist. The present focus of children in this stage and their reliance on lived personal experiences with things external to themselves as a basis for meaning-making define this stage (Piaget, 1952).

(3) Concrete Operational Stage (7 – 12 years) - According to Piaget, children at this stage begin to think logically. Mental constructions of various objects are based on observable attributes identified through personal experience. Mental constructions are concrete rather than abstract. During this stage, children begin to group and organize several qualities and attributes into a larger framework. Children can also organize and combine a number of qualities in sequence. Although objects are moved or reordered, no change in the object concept takes place (Piaget, 1952).

(4) Formal Operational Stage (12 years and beyond) -The characteristic of this stage of development is the ability to consider many possibilities for a given condition. Individuals at this stage are able to deal with propositions that explain concrete facts. They have the ability to use planning to think ahead. Most importantly, individuals at this final stage of cognitive development increase their ability to think abstractly. Children acquire the ability to envision and resolve hypothetical scenarios, such as events of the future in one's lifetime. Formal operational thinkers can recognize and identify a problem, can state several alternative hypotheses, execute procedures to collect information about the problems, and test their hypotheses (Piaget, 1952).

Regarding children's moral development, Piaget's (1962) observations of children in the pre-operational stage led him to believe that children begin in a "heteronomous" stage of moral reasoning, characterized by a strict adherence to rules and duties, and obedience to an authority. This heteronomy results from two factors. The first factor is the young child's cognitive structure. According to Piaget, the thinking of young children is characterized by egocentrism. That is to say, young children are unable to simultaneously take into account their own view of things with the perspective of someone else. This egocentrism leads children to project their own thoughts and wishes onto others. It is also associated with the uni-directional view of rules and power associated with heteronomous moral thought, and various forms of "moral realism." Moral realism is associated with "objective responsibility", which is valuing the letter of the law above the purpose of the law. This is why young children are more concerned about the outcomes of actions rather than the intentions of the person doing the act. Moral realism is also associated with the young child's belief in "imminent justice." This is the expectation that punishments automatically follow acts of wrong-doing.

Piaget (1962) explained that the second major contributor to heteronomous moral thinking in young children is their relative social relationship with adults. In the natural authority relationship between adults and children, power is handed down from above. The relative powerlessness of young children, coupled with childhood egocentrism feeds into a heteronomous moral orientation. However, through interactions with other children in which the group seeks to play together in a way all find fair, children find this strict heteronomous adherence to rules sometimes problematic. As children consider these situations, they develop towards an "autonomous" stage of moral reasoning, characterized by the ability to consider rules critically, and selectively apply these rules based on a goal of mutual respect and cooperation. The ability to act from a sense of reciprocity and mutual respect is associated with a shift in the child's cognitive structure from egocentrism to perspective-taking. Coordinating one's own perspective with that of others means that "what is right" needs to be based on fair reciprocity and equality measured by behavioural outcomes. Thus, Piaget viewed moral development as the result of interpersonal interactions through which individuals work out resolutions which all deem fair. Paradoxically, this autonomous view of morality as fairness is more compelling and leads to more consistent behaviour than the heteronomous orientation held by younger children.

Piaget's (1952) hierarchical stage model assumes that the development of increasingly complex and rational views of thinking is a desirable and a progressive outcome. A common argument is that children's cognitive development is limited and not sufficiently developed to have an authentic spiritual experience, or to contemplate esoteric spiritual questions. Wilber (2000) stated that because young children are incapable of taking the perspective of another and cannot comprehend abstract concepts, they are incapable of being spiritual. Piechowski's (2000) review of studies on children's spirituality suggested that children are able to shift perspective when in familiar situations and when their response is not dependent on verbal communication and explanations. In Harrison's (2000) study of spirituality in children ages 10 months to 8 years old, children were found to ask questions directly about God, existence, life and death, and patterns in nature. Thus, although Piaget's perspective has been very useful in establishing effective academic learning and organizational abilities for children, increased cognitive capacity and abstract thinking is not necessary for spiritual experiences. It is my opinion that children in the sensorimotor and pre-operational stages of cognitive development may be more in tune with and open to their experiences and may not be influenced by the perspectives and judgments of others in understanding and explaining these experiences.

Levine (1999) suggests that children's experiences of spirituality do not reflect a premature version of adult spirituality, but rather reflect unique and individual experiences that are not necessarily uniform across children and are not dependent on their developmental stage. She further proposes that resources of spirituality can be accessed by all humans, regardless of age and cognitive ability. With respect to relational consciousness, Hay and Nye (1998) argue that adults have a more difficult time accessing a here-and-now orientation because of their propensity towards abstract reasoning. Children who are in the sensorimotor and concrete operational cognitive stages are more able to access the present moment experience without judgement, evaluation, or analysis.

In a review of recent research, Gopnik, Meltzoff and Kohl (1999) make it clear that children's perceptual skills, from a very early age, give them the potential to be observant, aware and actively engaged in the world around them to see how it works and what is going on in it. The authors view the child as a scientist reaching temporary conclusions about his/her assumptions through actions that test the world and its nature as part of the learning process. Scott (2003) further explains that it may be that younger children have an advantage in that they do not have an experiential base in actual time lived to provide them with either a sense of past or future and so they are, of necessity, present oriented. Children's present oriented being is their particular reality. An awareness of time past and time to come will develop and make living in the present more difficult as they grow older. The capacity to be sensitive to the present moment is a necessary component of relational consciousness referred to by Nye and Hay (1996) as awareness sensing.

Behaviourism and social learning theories. According to Skinner's (1975) operant conditioning model, an individual's behaviour is a direct result of the consequences provided in his or her environment. Thus, from a behaviourist approach, spirituality is likely considered a learned phenomenon facilitated by environmental conditions. As described in the relational consciousness model, children use their experiences with the environment to explore and become aware of their unity with others. Once experienced, many of these spiritual understandings are maintained through the emotional and inner experiences, recognized and reinforced by the child as a positive state. As well, from Bandura's (1969, 1977) perspective of social learning, children come to understand themselves through their relationships with others and through awareness of relationship patterns with others. Thus, the importance of a social framework and environmental context is critical to understanding spirituality in children. Barnes, Plotnikoff, and Pendletonet (2000) indicate that parents try to directly educate and influence their children's concepts of spirituality. As well, children are inundated with social images and concepts of spiritual-like fantasy beings (e.g., Tooth fairy, Santa Claus, Easter Bunny, etc.). Therefore, children's spirituality and experiences may be influenced by family and social concepts of spirituality in addition to their own unique experiences. Social learning theory also suggests that unique forms of childhood spirituality may emerge as a reaction to parent and social views, rather than modelled from them and consequently, may differ from the perspectives of their parent and societal influences.

Humanistic psychology and attachment theory. Humanistic psychology provides a perspective of children that supports the view of children as spiritual beings. Thomas (2000) explains that "the biologically determined inner nature of the human consists of basic needs, emotions, and capacities that are either neutrally good or positively good" (p. 368). Maslow (1968) describes two basic human needs: deficiency need and growth/self-actualization need, from which all human behaviour can be understood.

Maslow (1968) presents a hierarchical stage model of these needs implying that humans must have all physiological and physical needs met before they can direct their attention to spirituality and self-actualization. However, individuals who have not had basic needs met, such as Ghandi, have reached levels of self-actualization and spiritual fulfillment. Dr. David Goa, a theology professor at the University of Alberta (personal communication, November 2, 2002), suggests that perhaps Maslow's hierarchy should in fact be inverted to indicate that true human life does not exist until an individual experiences connectedness and relationship with other, be it divine or otherwise. Until this occurs explains Goa, all life can be considered illusory. Maya Angelou once said: "of all the needs (there are none imaginary) a lonely child has, the one that must be satisfied, if there is going to be hope and a hope of wholeness, is the unshaken need for an unshakable God". This notion reminds me of importance of the infant's most basic need for secure, "unshakable" attachment to one's caregiver as a necessary condition for all future development.

From an attachment theory perspective, Bowlby (1969) proposed that infants are designed from birth to signal their parent (e.g., crying, smiling, following) to initiate the process of attachment and bonding. As infants age, these attachment behaviours are often activated when the child feels hurt, threatened or needs care. The predictability and consistency of the parents' response to their child fosters a sense of security in the child that encourages further exploration of and participation in the world around them. In later developments of his theory, Bowlby (1973) clarified that the child does not necessarily seek attachment by proximity alone, but must also perceive the attachment figure as stronger and wiser, particularly during times of stress. Therefore, according to Bowlby (1973) an attachment figure should be one that is perceived to be close in proximity, provides a consistent secure base and safe haven for the individual, and is considered stronger and wiser than the child. Interestingly, these characteristics have been demonstrated in individuals' perceived relationships with God, or a divine being. In a review of the recent literature in attachment theory and spiritual development in childhood, Granqvist & Dickie (2006) describe all four of Bowlby's criteria being met in an attachment relationship between children and their perceptions of a higher being. That is, children perceive God, or divine being(s) as a significant attachment figure. Similarly, Kirkpatrick (1998, 1999) found this attachment relationship between an individual and God to continue into adulthood, particularly when it had been securely established in childhood. Granqvist and Dickie further explain the importance of the longevity of this attachment relationship when coping with life challenges throughout development, especially when individuals have "out-grown" their reliance on parental figures for security and stability in times of stress. Due to the perceived omnipotent and omniscient qualities generally attributed to God or divine being(s), individuals who utilize this attachment figure are likely to find security and safety in this relationship throughout their lifetime.

Neurological evidence. In recent decades, biological and neurological research has advanced our understanding of human development. Research has revealed a strong genetic component in many human tendencies, behaviours, traits, and abilities. This is in agreement with a spiritual framework, which does not make distinctions between the mind, body and spirit in an individual. From a spiritual perspective, all of one's personal energy and previous history is contained in the genetic make-up of every individual (D'Onofrio et al., 1999). In this way, spirituality among children would likely have strong familial, biological, and genetic correlation. Similarly, from a Darwinian view, those individuals who have attained spiritual awareness may be more adaptable to adversity and difficulties and have developed personal models of resiliency that have facilitated survival (Hart, 2003). Hart explains that one's spirituality may lead to heightened sensory awareness that is necessary for connection to self, others, and one's environment. This was supported by Newberg, D'Aquili, and Rause (2001) who found strong neurological activity in the grey matter of the posterior superior parietal lobe of participants during deep meditative practice, when measured through MRI. These researchers further state that this area of the brain does not demonstrate similar activity in any of the participants as measured by an MRI during any other activities or circumstance. The authors explain that this specific area of the brain must have had evolutionary significance in order to have maintained function in current human development, suggesting a developmental purpose for spiritual experiences.

In a recent chapter, Newberg and Newberg (2006) explain there are a variety of spiritual experiences that exist along a neurological continuum, from mild feelings of "awe" to the sense of the "wholly other" of the divine being, to what has been called "absolute unitary being" (p. 184). Every spiritual experience along this continuum involves a sense of the unity of reality that is somewhat greater than that experienced in daily life. In the brain, what is seen is an increase in differential blocking of sensory input into the left and right posterior superior parietal lobes, which are responsible for self/other, distinction and time-space orientation, respectively. Hence, as individuals' spiritual experiences of unity intensify, sensory input to these areas of the brain is reduced, while activity in this region increases. Other areas of the brain reportedly critical to understanding and mapping spiritual experiences in the brain are components of the limbic system (the amygdala and hippocampus), which result in a strong affective component, and the frontal lobe which is associated with feelings of intense awareness and alertness; both of which are typically associated with spiritual experiences.

When reviewing brain development over the human lifespan, Newberg and Newberg (2006) explore childhood spiritual experiences and how these are facilitated by the brain's growth over time. During early childhood, ages 4-6 years, the child's brain experiences an increase in metabolic rate due to an overproduction of neurons and their connectedness. Newberg and Newberg suggest that this overproduction helps explain the increase in fantasy and imaginative powers in children this age. Because their brain is establishing so many new and different connections, areas of the brain typically not related in adulthood, may be related in children. Thus, there are few clearly defined rules or distinct boundaries resulting in the holding of multiple realities simultaneously. Hence, images and ideas of the divine would have little difficulty entering *all* aspects of a child's life and experiences. Similarly, the sense of self and other associated with the left parietal lobe has not yet solidified. Thus, children may experience a natural interconnectedness with the self and all other experiences, including those that are fantasy and imaginary. Interestingly, as the child ages, the distinction between areas of the brain increases resulting in a decrease in spontaneous childhood spiritual experiences.

Similarly, Strassman's (2001) research in neurological function reveals that young children may be more likely to exhibit spiritual awareness when compared with adults. Specifically, the author explains that the mind is recognized as having four distinct levels of measurable electrical activity or brain waves:

Delta:	Associated with deep sleep or coma.
Theta:	Present during relaxation, daydreaming, drowsiness, and also moments of insight, inspiration or deep healing meditation.
Alpha:	Produced in meditative states. Accelerates the body's natural healing process. Can change to theta waves.
Beta:	The most irregular wave pattern also carrying the lowest power voltage. Associated with the normal, waking state for most adults.

Strassman (2001) notes that adults spend approximately 80% of their wakefulness at the beta level of brain activity. Young children however, spend 80% of their waking hours in the alpha state - the electrical equivalent of a meditative state. They are, therefore, in a heightened state of sensitivity and awareness most of the time. This relates directly to children's capacity to experience the component of relational consciousness of "flow", which is described as a concentrated awareness of the present moment as described by Nye and Hay (1996). A child's mind is in an almost constant state of meditation and contemplation, and in a here and now orientation. Given that their brain is not as differentiated as those of adults however (Newberg & Newberg, 2006), children may not distinguish between this constant spiritual state and other states of "reality" typically defined by the adults around them.

Lev Vygotsky identified higher psychological functions of children, which may overlap with the "here and now" orientation of children described by Nye and Hay (1996). Recall that Nye and Hay explained that children are often able to focus and attend to the present moment and be acutely aware of the sensory stimulations around them. Similarly, Vygotsky (as cited in Thomas, 2000) explains that children's synthesis of language and thought is characterized by a marked conscious absence of time. That is, children may not have a conscious awareness of time, sequence, or of themselves in a given situation. Thus, in the absence of time-space orientation as well as a conscious self-observer, young children are fully immersed in the present moment and demonstrate a greater capacity to attune to the present moment as compared to adults.

Functions of Spirituality

Numerous epidemiological and clinical studies have documented the influence of spirituality, religious affiliation and religious involvement on health outcomes (Barnes et al., 2000; Koenig & Larson, 2001; Ray, 2004; Sexon, 2004; Stern, Canda & Doershuk, 1992). The majority of studies on the functions of spirituality have used North American adults and have primarily focused on its role in physical health and physical indicators of mental health, such as heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate, and galvanic skin response (Ray). Studies have investigated the relationship between dimensions of religiosity and spirituality and measures of disease states. Koenig and Larson (2001) report that nearly every major disease entity and cancer site has been studied with regard to spirituality and religion and that these studies consistently demonstrate a helpful and positive relationship between religious and spiritual involvement and health status. However, given the nature, design, and empirical challenges of this area of research no single study or review article specifically reports "proof" that religion cures or positively alters health.

Ray (2004) reviewed the healing and harming effects the mind can have on the body and its functioning. Ray concluded that our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and our hopes create neurochemical activity that can activate as our body's "first line of defence" against illness or as catalysts to negative health outcomes. Extending these ideas to mental health, Sue and Sue (2003) caution that religious and spiritual beliefs may have a positive or negative effect on the well-being and coping of an individual depending on the person's attributions related to life events and his or her locus of control. For example, an individual may believe in spiritual forces that are out of his or her personal control. This external locus of control may result in the attribution of negative life circumstances to fate or the will of spirits. An individual with this interpretation may not be inclined to activate resources or support because the event is perceived as fate or destiny. Similarly, an individual with spiritual beliefs promoting an internal locus of control may interpret life events as being a direct result of personal action. This orientation may or may not prevent individuals from seeking spiritual sources of help in their active coping process. In both situations, spiritual beliefs have the potential for helping or hindering an individual's psychological adjustment to life stressors.

For children, as with research in the area of spirituality, very little is available and known about the functions of spirituality in their lives. It is difficult to predict the function of spirituality for children given that very little is understood about how children conceptualize, interpret and utilize spirituality. The ability to transcend the present situation and feel a sense of connection and unity beyond the self (Nye & Hay, 1996) may assist children in removing themselves from the impact of adverse life events, thereby reducing mental health problems. Similarly, perceiving external or spiritual influences over one's current problems may also increase a child's sense of hope in the face of adversity (Nye and Hay, 1998; Piechowski, 2001; Scott, 2003; Sexon, 2004). Hope can be understood as a personal experience and a state of mind that is similar in nature to experiences of faith and love (Menninger, 1995). Farran, Herth and Popovich (1995) further explain that hope is intrinsically tied to hopelessness and suggest that hope is "grounded in some inescapable trial" (p. 6). In the case of immigrant children, overcoming one's problems in the face of adversity may be inspired by a sense of hope and may, in turn, increase their sense of hope. Alternatively, when adverse life events are attributed to external events or spiritual factors, this may encourage passive coping in relation to the stressful life event (Sexon; Sue & Sue, 2003) Passive coping may lead people to relinquish personal responsibility in addressing stressful events and consequently contribute to ongoing psychological distress if other supports are not utilized or recognized as helpful.

A child's sense of spirituality and/or engagement in a religious community may provide a structure for positive coping strategies. For example, different traditions offer varying interpretations of suffering and illness, as well as related means for feeling supported in the midst of difficult experiences. Such resources may provide a child with the sense of having added assistance in coping with difficult life circumstances. For example, congregational acts of worship may activate community or social supports that can facilitate coping (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Conversely, community beliefs may support spiritual explanations of life adversity, such as notions of being "punished" or events "happening for the purpose of a life lesson". Instances in which spirituality and coping have been found to intersect for children in existing research include night-time fear, psychiatric problems, suffering, hospitalization, disability, cancer, and terminal illness (Barnes et al., 2000). Children have also been found to find meaning in spirituality when facing a substance abuser, in coping with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome in other family members, as well as the critical illness of a sibling, or the death of a family member (Barnes et al.). Although little of the resilience literature directly examines the role of spirituality, that which does suggests that spirituality and involvement in a faith community can serve as protective factors against adversity (Koenig & Larson, 2001).

Spirituality and religious involvement may help children withstand the emotional assaults of sexual abuse, racism, cultural destruction, and the traumas generated by the immigrant experience and life in disenfranchised urban neighborhoods (Sue & Sue, 2003). Such experiences may represent spiritual crises in the lives of children (Hay and Nye, 1998). Spirituality in these cases may contribute to a stronger sense of cultural identity (Miller, 2002). Research on physical health suggests that spirituality may also influence the healing strategies people use to respond to health problems. Stern, Canda, and Doershuk, (1992) examined the relationship between health, religion, and spirituality among a sample of children dealing with cystic fibrosis. They demonstrated that spiritual and religious practices are prevalent and often perceived by children as helpful. Of the 70% who sought non-medical therapy, 60% used religious treatments such as prayer, pilgrimage, and the possession of religious objects. Of those participating in group prayer, the most common religious therapy, 65% reported frequent use of which 92% reported perceived benefits.

Religious and spiritual resources may affect how immigrant parents respond to their child's illness, disability, or psychological needs (Pargament, 1997). Parents may also define major losses as part of a greater picture or divine plan (Klass, 1991). The karmic traditions (e.g., Hindu or Buddhist) may interpret such losses in relation to deeds accumulated in present or past lives (Smith, 1991b). If parents/caregivers are part of a religious or spiritual community, this may also provide important support (Barnes et al., 2000; Coles, 1990). However, if a tradition encourages resignation to divine will or authority, it may be construed as supporting negative religious coping (Sue & Sue, 2003). This passive adaptation to a stressor perceived as uncontrollable can delay a family's response to illness, negatively affecting the family's sense of mastery and competence.

Parents may engage in religious therapies, either as complements or alternatives to biomedical therapies. Such healing techniques are common in nearly every spiritual/religious tradition (Smith, 1991). Religious therapies can include prayer, anointing, laying on of hands and other versions of faith healing, visits to the sick, pilgrimage, petitions and related vows to saints, exorcism, retrieval of a lost soul, animal sacrifice, the undoing of a curse, or amulets, icons, and other religious objects (Miller, 1999; Richards & Bergin, 2000). As well, in the pursuit of healing for their child, parents or caretakers may also seek out healers from their own religious context (Miller, 1999; Sue & Sue, 2003). Parents' use of religious therapies may reflect the conviction that non-religious/spiritual interventions can only address limited aspects of the person, or may otherwise prove futile.

Powell, Shahabi, and Thoresen (2003) recently reviewed the health benefits of spiritual and religious behaviours in coping with life stress and illness. The authors suggested that those individuals who turn to internal spiritual resources and religious rituals in times of stress and difficulty are able to cope and manage their adverse life events better than people who do not have access to spiritual coping resources.

Culturally Sensitive Intervention

According to the 2001 Statistics Canada report on religious affiliations, 83.8% of Canadians report belonging to a religion. Research has demonstrated that individuals with a religious and spiritual affiliation are likely to utilize this support throughout their lives, especially when coping with adverse life events (Miller, 2002; Miller & Thoresen, 2003). In an American Psychological Association publication, "*Integrating Spirituality into Treatment*" (Miller, 2002), the authors outline methods to assess and utilize various forms of spiritual and religious resources accessible to individuals to enhance their therapeutic experiences. These resources include meditation, prayer, surrender, forgiveness, and communal support. In the introduction of the text Miller (2002) states, "an understanding of people, individually and collectively, is incomplete without knowing about their spirituality". Similarly, in the *Handbook of Psychotherapy and Religious Divers*ity, Richards and Bergin (2000) emphasize that religious and spiritual diversity is a cultural fact that most mental health professionals will encounter in their practices and that the application and knowledge of these areas are essential to the credibility, longevity, and maintenance of ethical responsibility for all mental health providers.

Immigrant populations face a number of unique life challenges and adversities that distinguish them from other cultural groups and from their Canadian-born counterparts. These challenges set the stage for unique mental health concerns and needs which demand informed and competent treatment and care (Sue & Sue, 2003). The Canadian Multiculturalism Act guarantees immigrants the freedom to practice their religion and spirituality in the host society in its statement that "every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination and that everyone has the freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, opinion, expression…" (Government of Canada, p.2). Thus, it is extremely important for Canadian psychologists to understand the complexity and diversity of spiritual experience among immigrant families so that they are able to respect these experiences and draw upon them in the helping relationship (Arthur & Merali, in press; Sue & Sue, 2003).

Even though immigrant children do not exhibit high levels of psychological maladjustment in response to the occurrence of multiple life stressors, this does not mean that they will not be seen by counsellors or need help adjusting to their life challenges. Gladding (2004) describes counselling psychology as a profession devoted to prevention, growth, and remediation by assisting individuals, families and groups in adapting to life transitions and challenges at all stages of development. It has a dual focus on promoting wellness and addressing psychological distress. Therefore it is an integral role of counselling psychology professionals to provide culturally competent assistance to immigrants attempting to adjust to their new life in Canada. Since spiritual views and beliefs may play a positive or negative role in how children interpret their life situation, understanding and being open to their unique worldviews will inform treatment and intervention plans.

In their seminal work, Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis (1982) conceptualized counsellor cultural competence as a function of three counsellor attributes. The first attribute is the counsellor's understanding of his or her own cultural beliefs, biases, and values. This includes the values and biases within the profession. The second attribute is the counsellor's knowledge about the client's culture, including norms for behaviour and communication, beliefs, and values. The third requirement for cross-cultural competence is the counsellor's ability to create interventions that match the culture and needs of the client. Each of the counsellor attributes is divided into three dimensions of competence: (1) counsellor beliefs and attitudes, (2) knowledge, and (3) skills, with accompanying statements to operationalize each competency (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis; Sue & Sue, 2003).

The best practice for immigrant populations is outlined in theories of competent multicultural counselling. The multicultural approach to therapeutic practice emphasizes a respectful, client-centered counselling perspective that also considers all members of the family within their own cultural context. Individual differences within cultures are also taken into account (Sue & Sue, 2003). Beck and Gear (1960) emphasize that people carry culture with them, and when they leave one group setting for another, they do not shed the cultural premises of the former.

Thus, all individuals develop from within their own cultural context. Every person lives within a unique blend of their own cultural milieu. Prochaska and Norcross (2003) suggest that "traditional therapies, based on European-Caucasian middle-class, male assumptions, are increasingly inappropriate for addressing the problems of minority and oppressed groups" (p.419). Conversely, a multicultural framework offers an integrated acceptance of the many theoretical approaches that have demonstrated validity, but also offers the importance of matching the clients' worldview and problem conceptualization to the selected approach of treatment. This is the point of therapeutic expertise, which requires a systematic analysis of each client.

Sue, Ivey, and Pederson (1996) explain that each contemporary theoretical approach to counselling reflects the worldview of the society and culture from which it has been derived. Sue and Sue (2003) define worldview as "the way we make meaning in the world", which is often influenced by environment, cultural upbringing, life experiences, and socio-political forces, such as racism and oppression (Sue, Ivey & Pederson, 1996). Current theoretical approaches have been established from ethnocentric perspectives and do not represent the worldviews of many immigrant groups and thus cannot be adhered to without critical appraisal (Sue & Sue, 2003).

All cultures and individuals have multiple cultural belief systems that provide support and understanding during times of need such as, religion, social support, exercise, expert help, and a variety of alternative and folk remedies. Various individuals, within and among ethnic affiliations will differ in the resources they will utilize across life circumstances, and in their conceptualizations of their situation and circumstances. The following areas of mental health have been identified as being uniquely affected by immigrants' cultural beliefs and worldviews (McGoldrick & Giordano, 1996):

1. Their experience of the presenting problem and how it is manifested (physically, mentally, emotionally, etc.),
2. The labeling or identification of the problem or stressor,
3. How the problem or situation is communicated (verbally, non-verbally, or spiritual communication with the divine or spiritual leader, etc.),
4. Beliefs about the cause of the problem and its origin,
5. Attitudes towards helpers, specifically psychologists and medical professionals, and
6. Preferred treatments or healing strategies and beliefs about what will and will not be effective.

Fukuyama and Sevig (1999) argue that understanding clients' spirituality and incorporating spirituality in the helping process are core aspects of counsellors' cultural competency. Acquiring knowledge about clients' spirituality is a critical component of culture-specific knowledge. As well, using spirituality in the counselling process is a culturally-sensitive intervention skill and takes into account the clients' preferred and natural healing pathways. Understanding an individual's spirituality, particularly in relation to their health and well-being is critical to providing ethical and competent psychological care (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). As described earlier, most of the research in the area of spirituality has been with adults and has ignored children, unfortunately leaving psychologists ill prepared to assess and respond to childhood spirituality in the therapeutic process.

Statement of the Problem

Childhood is a valued and treasured time in human development when we acquire many of the skills and experiences necessary to become productive, happy, and healthy adults (Thomas, 2000). For children of immigrant families, this valued time of development may be disrupted and challenged by stressors that increase their risk for psychological maladjustment. These include separation from family members, changes in family socioeconomic status, family conflict, weakened parent-child attachments, social isolation or exclusion, and experiences of racism or discrimination (Lago & Thompson, 1996). Despite these challenges, children of immigrant families have not exhibited higher rates of psychological distress than their Canadian-born counterparts (Health Canada, 1999). It has been suggested that a critical and natural source of strength and resilience for immigrant families is spirituality (Hill et al., 2000; Richards & Bergin, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2003).

Spirituality is unique in expression and definition to every knower but may be broadly understood as the feelings, acts, experiences, and connections related to whatever one may consider as divine or transcendent (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). This may involve a deep sense of devotion, love, faith and/or connection that is accessed through acts of religious ritual, solitary or congregational worship (e.g., prayer, chanting, meditation or journaling), or unique personal expressions of spirituality. An individual's spiritual connections have been described as encompassing any or all of four types of relationships (Hay & Nye, 1998): Relationship between the self and God (or divine being(s)/spirits), the self and others, the self and the world (i.e., animals, nature, or environment), and consciousness of a relationship with oneself.

Spirituality may inform how an individual views, experiences, and understands the world, particularly in relation to framing significant life events and adversity. For example, due to perceived connections between the spiritual and material worlds, many immigrant families may display a tendency to attribute negative life events/circumstances to unnatural or supernatural causes, and may also view the solutions to their difficulties to be externally influenced (Sue & Sue, 2003). In addition, spirituality and/or religious involvement can help people to understand and withstand the emotional assaults of grief due to compound losses, racial discrimination, cultural destruction, and the traumas generated by the immigrant experience (Sue & Sue). The ability to transcend the present situation and feel a sense of connection and unity beyond the self (Nye & Hay, 1996) may assist children of immigrant families in understanding and/or coping with the impact of adverse life events (Nye and Hay, 1998; Piechowski, 2001; Scott, 2003; Sexon, 2004). Furthermore given young children's developmental tendencies towards imagination and fantasy, they may construct their own unique view spirituality to cope with and understand their life experiences. In addition, acts of worship and spaces for congregation utilized by their family may further activate community or social supports that can facilitate coping (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Alternatively, when adverse life events are attributed to external events or spiritual factors, this may encourage passive coping in relation to the stressful life event, which may lead children to relinquish personal responsibility in addressing stressful events (Sexon; Sue & Sue, 2003).

Despite its importance, very little is understood about how children conceptualize spirituality and its role in their lives (Mabe & Josephson, 2004; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Piechowski, 2001). Although some researchers have questioned children's capacities for abstract spiritual experiences (Best, 1996; Hoffman, 1998; Levine, 1999), a review of multiple studies conclude that genuine spiritual experiences are accessible to children (Piechowski), and in some cases may be more accessible than in adulthood (Newberg & Newberg, 2006; Strassman, 2001). Unfortunately, to date the majority of existing studies on spirituality in children utilize retrospective (e.g., adult recollections) and indirect methods (e.g., parental interviews) to access and research childhood spiritual experiences, conceptions and expressions (Harrison, 2000; Hart, 2003; Hoffman, 1992). Furthermore, these studies do not examine the role spirituality plays among children adjusting to and interpreting challenging life events, with the exception of medical illness (Frangoulls, Jordan, & Lansdown, 1996; Stuber, & Houskamp, 2003), and have not included samples of children of immigrant families who may encounter increased life stressors (Sue & Sue, 2003). Existing research exploring functions of spirituality has also focused on its relation to physical health status, rather than its implications for mental health (Ray, 2003: Koenig & Larson, 2001).

Purpose of the Study

In a recent issue of the *American Psychologist*, exploration of childhood spirituality and its functions was identified as critical direction for future research (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Consistent with this research direction, the purpose of this study was to explore spirituality among young children of immigrants adjusting to adverse life events from their own perspective. The guiding research questions were: (a) How do children of immigrant families conceptualize and understand spirituality in their lives? (b) What is/are their experience(s) of spirituality? (c) What role does spirituality play in their attempt to understand, adjust to and respond to adverse events in their lives?

Chapter 3

METHOD

This section will describe the methodology of basic qualitative inquiry that facilitated the exploration of immigrant children's spirituality in this study. This is followed by a description of the participants in this study as well as the selection criteria and recruitment strategy utilized. A detailed description and rationale about the general interview process and methods will then be presented. This section will then conclude with an evaluation of the study methodology used according to criteria for quality control in qualitative research (Ellis, 1998; McLeod, 2001; Stiles, 1993).

Understanding the Paradigm

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), a researcher must explore and understand the paradigm from which he or she is working before consideration is given to the research methodology and throughout the research process. Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe one's paradigm as representing "a worldview that defines for its holder, the nature of the world, the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts" (p. 107). The authors present a series of questions that they view as necessary to answer in determining one's overarching paradigm (p.108).

1. The ontological question. What is the form and nature of reality and, what is there that can be known about it?
2. The epistemological question. What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?
3. The methodological question. How can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?

From the perspective of these three questions, Guba and Lincoln (1994) constructed four paradigms, which include positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism. Briefly, positivism assumes a natural world order where reality is objective and able to be understood in a clear and unbiased way by the knower. Representing the modern notion of error, post-positivism, also seeks an objective reality, but one that cannot be perfectly grasped. Critical theory places knowledge in context through the application of historical realism, that is, a virtual reality shaped by certain values found in society through factors such as gender and culture. Finally, constructivism seeks out individual and socially constructed realities.

In consideration of the four theoretical perspectives described above, constructivism was determined to be the most compatible with the understanding of children's spirituality in this study. The diversity of spiritual experiences and expressions in children precludes uncovering a consistent spiritual phenomenon across individuals and cultures (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999; Miller 2002). As identified in the literature, spirituality is expressed in unique ways across individuals and throughout the life span, such as a felt sense of unity with nature, a relationship with God or other divine beings, a deep awareness of the present moment, and a sense of connection with self or others (Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Nye & Hay, 1996; Pargament, 1999). From the view of the constructivism framework, knowledge is not based on fact or reality, but on one's individual and unique experiences, which are relative and subjective. As well, one's knowledge is also considered to be continually constructed and influenced by social and personal relationships. Thus, constructivism recognizes that there is not one truth, but many. An implication of this epistemology is the acceptance of multiple subjective truths.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) further emphasize the normative and societal contribution to one's constructions and realties and state that qualitative inquiry should help the researcher "understand the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold, aiming toward consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve" (p.113). Thus, realities are typically altered and knowledge is seen as being created within the interaction between individuals (e.g., the researcher and the participant). Hence, the results of the present study are presented in the form of the story of the interaction between the researcher and the participant so as to allow for the transparency of interpretation to be left to the reader. Similarly, according to Guba and Lincoln, "the investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that the 'findings' are literally created as the investigation proceeds" (p.111). As such, many constructions, experiences, and interpretations of spirituality emerged from the researcher's interactions with each participant and their parents as well as over time across interviews. Furthermore the research based on initial interviews informed the research process with each child and across participants as the study progressed. This epistemological framework is further described by Crotty (2003). "All knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their worlds, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42). Thus, on the epistemological continuum, the paradigm of the present study respects the individual and subjective view of spirituality that is framed, expressed, and experienced through interaction with others, including that which was explored with the researcher.

Basic Qualitative Inquiry

Methodologically, this study is best described as a basic qualitative inquiry. Merriam (2002) outlined the purpose and key features of a basic qualitative study as exploring participants' interpretations of their experiences, exploring the meanings they make from their experiences, and discovering how they have constructed their worlds. Similarly, the intention of the research was to discover the spiritual world and explore the meaning of spirituality among immigrant children adjusting to adversity in their lives. It is also important to note that basic qualitative inquiry does not rely solely on one method. According to Merriam (1998):

> Many qualitative studies in education do not focus on culture or build a grounded theory; nor are they intensive case studies of a single unit or bounded system. Rather, researchers who conduct these studies, which are probably the most common form of qualitative research in education, simply seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved (p. 11).

In relation to qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy, McLeod (2001) explains that basic or generic qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to be "flexible in relation to the challenges arising from their engagement with a topic and gives the researcher more freedom to adapt the role of the bricoleur" (McLeod, p.131). The idea of the researcher as a bricoleur is the view that knowledge is not produced by method, but that the researcher's work is consciously informed by a broad philosophical and interdisciplinary perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Although a truly effective researcher as bricoleur would require extensive experience and knowledge across all research paradigms, the principle of being informed by the paradigm, versus the method, of research, applies to the methodology utilized in this study, which is that of basic and generic qualitative inquiry.

Basic qualitative inquiry as defined by Merriam (1998) and generic qualitative methodology as described by McLeod (2001) emphasize common elements of qualitative research. According to McLeod, all qualitative research is informed by hermeneutics. Hermeneutics, meaning the art of interpretation, is a dialectical qualitative approach that helps the researcher to interpret complex phenomena and experiences that emerge from the interview process and to disseminate meaning to the reader (Gallagher, 1992; Weinsheimer & Marshall, 1989). Hermeneutics comes from the name Hermes, who was the messenger of the Gods in Greek mythology. McLeod (2001) explains that hermeneutics was established in the context of scriptural interpretations of biblical text in order to interpret God's message within the publicly available document. As such, the messenger, paralleling the researcher does their best to translate, interpret, and disseminate the knowledge accumulated throughout the interaction, with full acknowledgment of their own presence in the interaction. While hermeneutics informs basic qualitative inquiry, McLeod (2001) identifies two areas where traditional hermeneutics differs from basic qualitative inquiry:

> First, hermeneutics is essentially a culturally and historically informed method. Second, to work properly as a system for producing reliable and practical knowledge, hermeneutics requires the existence of publicly accessible data. Neither of these factors is necessary to conduct in inquiry that is simply 'interpretive' (p. 22).

While there are various forms of hermeneutic research, three themes remain constant throughout the various forms. The three themes are: "the inherent creativity of interpretation, the pivotal role of language in human understanding, and the interplay of part and whole in the process of interpretation" (Smith, 1991a, p. 190).

Smith (1993) and Ellis (1998) describe interpretation as a creative, holistic process which values all elements of the participant's and researcher's experiences and emphasizes the role of language in the interpretation process. This was particularly important for the present study of spirituality where language and home and host cultural norms influenced how each child conceptualized and experienced his or her spirituality (Miller, 2002; Richards & Bergin, 2000; Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999). Ellis explains that although each path of qualitative inquiry is unique and varies across researchers, there are common elements that occur and support a general flow of an inquiry informed by hermeneutics. Each of these elements described by Ellis was experienced in the present research endeavour and are briefly articulated in the following descriptions. Further elaboration will be provided later in this section:

1. The entry question: the researcher starts the interview process with openness, humility and genuine interest in the area of inquiry. Questions are simple and open, and do not imply an answer (e.g., why? how?). This openness was critical to facilitate unique and individual expressions and meanings of children's spirituality in this study and implicitly encouraged the participant to discover their own views and beliefs without perceived expectation from the researcher.
2. The spiral: The interaction between the micro and the macro in interpretation is termed the hermeneutic circle or spiral. Each loop in the spiral represents a separate exploration within the study. That is, the answer to each question at every loop often influences the direction and nature of the next stage of inquiry. As the spiral unfolds, the interpreter gets closer to understanding the inquiry. The major turning point in most studies occurs following the first loop, which is usually global and unfocused. This spiral process occurs within and across every interview process, as was experienced in this study. The spiral was experienced upon initiation of the interview process and following the initial entry question. Each participant

led the researcher through a unique journey of inquiry and discovery based on their own responses, interaction and communication styles, and feelings of comfort and security with the researcher.

3. Uncoverings: These are unexpected findings or "surprises" that result from the inquiry process. Uncovering is an essential component ensuring continual flow of the process and allows the researcher to further understand the question and potentially reframe the process of inquiry (the next loop) throughout the interview process. It was due to uncoverings within and across interviews with participants that the direction of questioning and interview process continually evolved and informed the present research process immensely. For example, when a participant communicated a worldview of spirituality that was unique, surprising, and inconsistent with known literature, the researcher redirected the inquiry process to better synthesize with the participant's presented worldview.
4. Multi-loop versus single-loop inquires: Multi-loop inquires describes the continual process of questioning and multiple opportunities for "data-collection", which was the case for the present study. That is, upon reflection of the initial parent and child interviews, the researcher chose to have secondary interviews with participants. Although this was also decided a-priori, the initial interviews informed the initial direction of the secondary interviews. Single-loop studies have only one data-collection activity but the original data is then re-examined multiple times as the original question is reframed and new ways of seeing the data emerge. Hermeneutic researchers often combine these two approaches to inquiry.
5. The forward and backward arc (hermeneutic circle): The *forward arc* represents projection and refers to the researcher's initial approach to the information. This first step draws on one's own interpretive framework, beliefs and values. Packer and Addison (1989) explained that within the forward movement, our preconceived notions allow us to consider and reflect on the interpreted before we encounter it, and upon our initial encounters with it. This approach recognizes the impossibility of objectivity and respects that the researcher's own

history and culture frames the interpretation process. The *backward arc* refers to the process of evaluation where the researcher re-evaluates the initial 'forward' interpretation and looks for contradiction, confirmation, or any alterations in which to view the previously examined data. Through the process of inquiry, the researcher unfolds both the purpose and meaning of the search for subjective truth (Ellis, 1998). Both the forward and backward arc were experienced throughout this study, predominantly with regard to the participants understanding of their own spirituality, ability to communicate this to the researcher, and in their capacity for authentic spiritual experiences. In all three cases, as will be elaborated on further in this document, the researcher was deeply changed and moved by the participants' spirituality extending well beyond all predetermined expectations.

The sequence and quality of these four elements did not occur in a linear and discrete fashion. As Ellis (1998) explains the flow of these elements may occur repeatedly, simultaneously, and congruently throughout the interview process, which was certainly the case in this study. These elements were considered as a guiding framework that provided the researcher with a way to outline, reflect upon, monitor and inform the process of research; an experience well supported and documented in basic qualitative inquiry (Ellis; Packer & Addison, 1989; Smith, 1993; Weinsheimer & Marshall, 1989).

Identifying the Research Question and the Researcher's History

Basic qualitative inquiry emphasizes the importance of the researcher's interest and participation in the inquiry. The first question I asked myself before embarking upon this research, was, "Why do I want to study the area of spirituality in children"? Do I have a committed and authentic interest in the topic? Ellis (1998) discusses the importance of seeking genuine understanding from research that is rooted in interest for the topic as well as for the participant. She also states that "what one can see at any given time is limited by one's vantage point, or what in hermeneutics is called one's horizon" (p. 8). If this is the case and we cannot separate who we are from our research, hermeneutics suggests that we embrace this perspective and increase our awareness of the horizon from which we and others see the world. It is critical then to reflect on my own interest in and experience of spirituality throughout my life to best understand the horizon from which I approached this research.

Since I was a young girl, I have had a genuine and instinctive interest in spirituality because of my own cultural and religious upbringing and memorable spiritual experiences. One of my earliest childhood memories is of my loving dog, Spotty, who had been a gift to our family from my father's colleague around my first birthday. My memory is of when I was about 5 years old and Spotty assumed his usual position resting by my side as we prepared for bedtime. My habit was to place my hand on the side of his chest and feel the movement of my hand with his breath as we both drifted off to sleep. On this particular occasion, I remember trying to match my breath to his, which was at a pace much faster than my own. In reaching a common rhythm, I remember an intense feeling of connection and love binding the two of us together as the room filled with a warmth and light. Then, looking down at my hand and being unable to distinguish it from Spotty's white fur. Time seemed to slow down and although awake, Spotty's usual playful movements fell completely still. Whatever we experienced that night appeared to be felt by both of us because this became a ritual we maintained until his death when I was 20 years old. Even in writing this passage, I viscerally remember the feeling of his fur, the warmth of his body, the pace of his heart, and the peace in my beingness. I often revisit this recollection and find my way back to "our" breath during times of emotional strain and difficulty, as it quickly calms and reconnects me with a sense of peace. I have had other experiences such as these over the years with loved ones (primarily children), with nature, and as expressed with myself and my memories and have come to understand them as "spiritual". Specifically the sense of connectedness, belonging, strength, and peace becomes an intensely spiritual experience.

As a child, these occurrences became a way to both understand and gain distance from the world. I remember being very conscious of these moments and often trying to re-create the experience in my daily life. Sometimes, as was the case with the example above, accessing these moments of peace and tranquility were perceived to be in my control, whereas other moments just seemed to happen. Regardless of how and when I felt "spiritual", I always regarded these experiences and feelings as positive and felt a deep sense of gratitude for them. Other spiritual acts also became a great source of strength and personal resource during times of difficulty and confusion. I remember "praying" intensely when I was about seven years of age following attendance at a friend's funeral. Because my soccer-mate, Sarah, was not Muslim, the rituals at her funeral ceremony were unfamiliar and spiritually unsatisfying to me. As such, my "prayer" took the form of a conversation or dialogue with the creator. Upon reflection, I am not sure how, but at the time I was convinced that I was receiving answers. This form of "prayer" was not part of any religious ritual or ceremony, but created a personal and effective source of peace and healing that I utilized throughout my childhood. It was not until my adolescence, and only for a short period of time, that I relied heavily on religious rituals to guide my spiritual process.

I have been raised as an Ismaili Muslim, which is an esoteric sect of Islam that emphasizes self-awareness, unity with all life, balance of material and spiritual aspects of one's life, and a personal connection with the creator (or Allah). From this religious framework, all of life is guided by Allah for the purpose of awareness and understanding. That is, nothing occurs by coincidence or without spiritual meaning. However, there are many religious beliefs and rituals that accompany this tradition that I do not subscribe to such as providing food offerings to God, long periods of fasting (e.g., Ramadan), or the idea of spiritual hierarchy amongst members of the congregation. However, rituals of private individual prayer, sacred space (at home or mosque), and meditation have been important resources of strength, understanding, wisdom, support, and self-growth for me over the years as have been spending time in nature, being with children and animals, and service to others. These practices, both personal and religious, have supported the development of a personal spiritual framework, which is not entirely explained by my religious affiliation or upbringing. In times of difficulty, these resources have been fundamental to my recovery, growth and development and constitute my strongest source of personal resiliency to adverse life outcomes. In addition, religion and spirituality have framed times of immense happiness and successes that I have encountered throughout my life. Spirituality is integral to my being and informs every facet of my life. Although my own sense of spirituality has always played a very positive role in my life, aspects of religious teachings and rituals have not. Consequently, I do not imagine that spirituality is necessarily a positive experience for all individuals, but I make the assumption that it is a significant one, in whatever form it takes. For this reason, I am sincerely invested in exploring this area of human experience.

Since embarking on the study of psychology, particularly child psychology, I have noted the omission of spirituality and limited attention to religiosity in the study of child development and intervention. Mostly, I find it remarkable that very little appreciation is given to children's capacities to express, understand and experience these elements of their own lives. Given the influence of these facets in my experiences and in understanding my own life during childhood, I am committed to understanding and learning about these components in the lives of other children. When I started working with children and families throughout my graduate training in psychology, I was sensitive to the variety of resources individuals may utilize to comprehend their life circumstances particularly during times of stress and difficulty. So, as part of my initial interview process with new clients, I paid close attention to understanding their worldview and also began asking about individual resources for strength and recovery. Not to my surprise, religious and spiritual beliefs and practices often surfaced as natural healing pathways for clients across ages and cultures. A finding that did surprise me was how often spirituality informed the etiology or rationale for clients' presenting issue(s).

I met a young Muslim mother who had self-referred her family for counselling, with particular concern regarding her son, Aly. Aly was adopted from Pakistan and had recently had his eighth birthday at which time he began to display feelings of anxiety related to his birth story, his identity, and his attachment to his birth mother in Pakistan. Although Aly was adopted as an infant, he exhibited feelings of insecure attachment to his adopted parents and asked existential questions including: Why was I brought to Canada? Did my birth mother want me to be Muslim? Won't my mother miss me or need me to come back? Why don't I look like my family? Aly's concerns manifested as separation anxiety, poor and restless sleep, lack of appetite, anger and hostility towards his parents and younger adopted sister. Aly's mother had conceptualized his distress from her own spiritual framework and beliefs, which maintained that a child's soul chooses their birth family and consequently is inextricably tied to the soul of his or her natural parent. She was feeling guilty for removing Aly from his birth mother, via the adoption and often wondered if his anxiety was in response to the perceived spiritual connection with his birth mother who was now "calling him home". Working with Aly and his family required sensitivity to the spiritual beliefs of the family and the conscious inclusion of his mother's beliefs into the case conceptualization and intervention plan. This case highlights the delicacy and strength of spiritual beliefs in the etiology, maintenance and treatment of childhood separation anxiety.

I also had the opportunity to work with an eight-year-old girl, Sara, who had been referred for symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder. In an initial interview with Sara's mom, Mariah, she explained that Sara is often anxious about death, particularly related to the afterlife. Mariah revealed that their family has very strong atheist beliefs and tried to support Sara by scientific and practical explanations of death. Mariah further explained that she was raised with atheist beliefs by her parents, who are Jewish survivors of the WWII holocaust. Through my work with Sara, she expressed deep concern and anxiety related to the existence of God stemming from a negative encounter with three peers at school. Sara explained that her peers said she and her family would "go to hell" if they did not believe in God. Through this experience, Sara developed the idea that God existed and recognized herself as a non-believer. Shortly after this encounter, Sara's father was diagnosed with a degenerative neurological illness, which Sara felt to be her fault; she concluded that her dad's illness was a punishment from a malevolent God. As a result, Sara was terrified and confused about death and worried about the fate of her family. Sara's existential questions dominated our therapeutic process and alienated her from her family's own atheist belief system. This case was personally challenging because Sara's encounter with the religious beliefs of others negatively contributed to her overall mental health, a perspective that was different from my own experiences and beliefs. Working with Sara reinforced the need to better understand children's unique conceptions of spirituality and how it impacts adjustment to and understanding of life adversity.

Working with Sara was one of the many experiences that challenged my own belief system that understood religious experiences to have a generally positive impact an individual's life and serve as a source of strength and coping. As a result of my clinical experiences, my 'horizon' shifted and recognized the diversity of individual expression and interpretation of spirituality, particularly as it relates to mental health. Prior to this and other similar experiences, I assumed the meaning of the religious experiences to be positive and supportive and contribute to an overall positive spiritual framework. Although my own assumptions were projected into the forward arc of the hermeneutic circle upon embarking on this study, it was critical to remain open in order for other views and perspectives to be explored. This insight informed the framework of my research questions and highlighted the importance of language in the research process.

Qualitative inquiry involves addressing and indeed actively engaging one's subjectivities or forestructures (Ellis, 1998; Merriam, 1998). This process of active and conscious awareness of the research process places the researcher in a position of humility; it was with this in mind that my intention was to be self-critical and conscious of the influence of my own involvement throughout all stages of the research process, including the presentation of the results. I found the maintenance of conscious awareness of my forestructures to be specifically challenging during the interviews with the children and preparation and presentation of these interviews. Because each child expressed such unique views of spirituality compared to my own, the position of humility and constant revisiting through the backward arc was critical to ensure that my interview process was open and unassuming and that the authenticity of the child's voice is represented in the presentation of findings. It was clear however, that my pre-understandings and previous life experiences maintained and informed my interest, passion and genuine curiosity for this research throughout the process. As Ellis (1998) explains:

> One must start with openness, humility and genuine engagement. … The question posed has to be a real one rather than an abstract debate or position on an issue one wishes to promote. One must begin by acknowledging that one does not know the answer or that one does not know what to do to be helpful in a situation one cares about. Useful entry questions tend to be simple and open. They are not rhetorical; they do not imply an answer (p. 18).

Language

In conducting basic qualitative inquiry, the researcher provides a context for understanding that is influenced by his/her own worldview (Gadamer, 1995). Gadamer (1995) emphasises the importance of language as well as one's cultural pre-understandings in the interpretation of meaning and truth by the researcher and the reader; he noted that language is a key element of how understanding is experienced. "Language is the medium in which substantive understanding and agreement take place between two people" (Weinsheimer & Marshall, 1989, p.384).

The importance of language is critical throughout all stages of the qualitative inquiry, whether it is to communicate with the participant, to re-present their ideas in text, or to analyze and interpret meaning from the language and symbolism used by participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Ellis (1998) cautioned that language can both enable and limit interpretation. This is particularly true in the context of this research, where the children's spiritual experiences are informed by language based on culture, heritage, acculturation, beliefs, and traditions that were highly variable across participants. It was extremely critical to respecting each participant's own language and communication style for identifying and explaining their spirituality and spiritual experiences (e.g., related to God, divine spirit, nature, self, others, community). Furthermore, it was important that the interviews with the children were informed by their cultural upbringing and religious frameworks, as described by their parents. Thus, a cross-cultural and subjective understanding of the meaning and experience of spirituality was important. To respect the delicacy of the language used by the participants, it must be understood within these larger overarching constructs guiding individual accounts. Thus, as described below, the importance of understanding the experience that is of interest within the larger context of the individual's life is critical for deep and meaningful interpretation.

Holistic/Part-Whole Relationship

Ellis (1998) and Smith (1993) describe the importance of part-whole and micro/macro relationships in contextualizing the meaning and interpretation of information in qualitative research. Understanding the specific (emic) as well as its relationship to the general (etic), allows for a holistic interpretation of the participants' disclosures. The importance of this framework is evidenced in the present study. As with language use, to understand the spirituality of the participants, it was critical to be aware of and understand each child's family context, including the family's spiritual or religious orientation, their immigration and cultural history, and current life stressors or adversities as perceived by the child's participating parent. With regard to spiritual and religious orientation, it was also important to understand the belief systems present in the family and the role this plays in their parenting and in their child's life, specifically, how spirituality relates to the child's and family's view of life adversity. In attempting to gain a holistic view of children's spirituality, it was important however to be cautious in the use of parents' disclosures as contextual information only rather than as the vehicles through which children's experiences were understood or conveyed. The use of adults, particularly parents' voices instead of children's voices in the study of child spirituality, is a key limitation of existing research that was intentionally addressed in the purpose of the present research (Harrison, 2000; Hart, 2003; Piechowski, 2001).

The inclusion of context in basic qualitative inquiry was refreshing and in contrast with my past experiences with quantitative research methodologies. From a positivist paradigm, the goal of research design is to "isolate the variable" to a specific measurable and predictable construct in order to adequately assess findings. That is, unless a variable was "controlled", data would be considered "spoiled". From this view, the context of the participant, his or her identity and social (familial) context was not considered or appreciated as information. This research aimed to identify the meaning of an experience for each participant; therefore, respecting and including the contextual environment as a legitimate focus of study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Research Participants

For the purpose of this research endeavour, it was important that the children selected for participation be at an age where their concepts and uses of spirituality were most likely to incorporate their own imagination and unique worldviews, rather than be an expression of those around them (Fowler & Dell, 2004). Specifically, in Fowler and Dell's identification of stages of faith development, children ages eight through twelve begin to adopt the definitions of their religious teachings and/or the ideologies of the people around them, particularly their parents. Thus, as children age, their descriptions of spirituality tend to become rigidly defined by external sources, rather than unique and diverse self-creations. By the age of thirteen, children demonstrate evidence of dependence on their parents' or dominant cultural expressions of faith and spirituality (Fowler & Dell). Although it is unknown what specific role young children's unique spiritual views play in their lives as adults, Fowler and Dell explain that these early beliefs and experiences play an important role in adulthood as these individuals develop and utilize their faith beliefs. Understanding the existence, meaning, and use of spirituality as constructed by the children themselves may allow for a deeper view of the origins of adult spirituality as well as an exploration of the innate spiritual capacity of children and its use in their young lives.

Given the qualitative nature of this study, it was also important that the children be able to attend to the research task and express their spirituality to the researcher in some form. Therefore, based on developmental evidence and previous research findings indicating the ages at which children are able to share and express their spiritual beliefs and maintain an imaginative and unstructured view of their spirituality (Barnes et al., 2000; Coles, 1992; Harrison, 2000; Hay & Nye, 1998; Hull, 2000; Fowler, 1968; Kazdin, 2003; Piechowski, 2001, Thomas, 2000), children ages four through seven years of age were considered ideal for participation.

The following sections review the selection and recruitment criteria, process and rationale used in identifying appropriate individuals who were to be invited to participate in this study. This is followed by a description of the final group of children who offered their time and wisdom to this research.

Selection and Recruitment Process

The participants for this study were selected through the process of *purposeful sampling*, which is based on the assumption that the researcher intends to discover, understand, and gain insight from a sample of participants with whom the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). Hence, as expressed above, the age of the children requested for participation was four through seven years. In addition to age, participants were to be from an immigrant family where the children themselves or their parents are immigrants to Canada. However, in order to allow for the initial settlement process to occur, a minimum of three years of residence in Canada was a pre-requisite for involvement. Specifically, the first three years after immigration is generally considered the time devoted to settlement and integration into the new society and to achieving a minimal level of stability in the new country (e.g., obtaining housing, connecting to settlement and healthcare services, and school registration) (Prendes-Lindel, 2001). In addition, all participating children had to be able to communicate in English so that their spirituality could be directly relayed to the researcher. Given the nature of the research question, it was critical that the child participants develop rapport and trust with the researcher. It is thought that the presence of an interpreter would make the development of this relationship difficult, or impossible, and may affect the child's ability to participate in the research with sincerity and honesty. As parents of participating children might have varying levels of English fluency, an interpreter was available to those who needed or requested one.

Further to purposeful sampling, the parents of the participating children were asked to self-identify *spirituality,* and not necessarily religion, as a significant source of influence in their family's lives. Furthermore, parents were also asked to confirm that from their perspective, their child had experienced at least one significant immigration-related life concern. The identified adverse experience(s) could have occurred prior to migration, during the migration process, or after immigration to Canada but needed to have directly affected the child's adjustment. A final component of purposeful sampling was with regards to including participants from diverse cultural backgrounds and "spiritual" affiliations (i.e., organized religions and informal spiritual traditions). This was done to best appreciate the diversity of the immigrant experience and to intentionally understand the construct of "spirituality", rather than "religiosity" in the children who participated. In order to access this diversity and in consideration of the nature of the basic qualitative inquiry paradigm, the intention was to invite five to six immigrant children and their parent(s) to participate.

Immigrant parent-child dyads were informed about this study through the distribution of study descriptions in settlement agencies, healthcare centres, cultural or faith-based community associations, and immigrant-populated daycares, pre-schools and secular schools (see Appendix A). A specific staff member within each of these agencies was provided with a sign-up sheet where the names of interested and eligible families and their telephone contact information were to be listed for the researcher. No other information about the family was documented or to be provided to the researcher. After the information was relayed to the researcher by the contact person they were instructed to shred the sign-up sheet. So as to not have an accumulation of interested participants, the researcher communicated with the agency contacts weekly. The participating staff member signed a confidentiality agreement form to ensure that the identities of interested families were not revealed (see Appendix B).

Upon receiving information about interested families, the researcher proceeded to contact the parents of potential participants by phone to directly inform them about the nature of the study, confirm that all selection criteria for the study were met, answer any questions they had about the research, confirm their English proficiency and when agreed upon, their participation times for interviews with both the parent and child were arranged. Depending on the families' preference the interviews took place either through home visits or private rooms booked at the Education Clinic at the University of Alberta. Upon meeting the participating families and prior to beginning the interviews, the contents of the informed consent form (see Appendix C) were first verbally explained to the participating parents and their signatures were obtained. Before obtaining parental consent however, the researcher confirmed that the parents had understood the intention of the research and exactly what the child interviews would consist of. Upon completion of the parent interview and meeting the participating child, he or she was presented with and orally read the children's assent form (see Appendix D), which was needed to continue the research process. Both child and parent forms are written in simple and developmentally appropriate language.

Participating families were all given a small remuneration for their involvement in the study. The compensation was $75.00 per family for the entire interview process. This amount was offered to the families for two reasons. First, immigrant families may encounter significant financial hardship due to forced resettlement and the associated loss of resources, as well as underemployment and unemployment due to a lack of recognition of foreign credentials (Baptiste, 1993; Levenbach & Lewak, 1995). This may require them to work multiple jobs to survive and participation in the research may interfere with or take away time from gainful employment. Second, since the research could occur in the participants' own homes, it was important to provide compensation for the use of their personal space for research activities. The amount was selected so that it offers appropriate compensation without being perceived as a significant incentive for study participation. Children who participated in the interview were also given a small gift upon ending the first interview, such as a game, a colouring book, pens, or a small toy. As well, children were given a certificate of participation in the research study to honour the importance of their participation.

Description of Participants

Six immigrant parent-child dyads were recruited from the various immigration agencies, schools, and health centers contacted about this research. Collectively, the participants represented a range of religious and cultural worldviews, as well as secular spiritual orientations, and were purposefully sampled to reflect the greatest amount of diversity from interested potential participants. The participating children ranged in age from four to six years and were either in pre-kindergarten,

kindergarten or first grade at the time of their interviews. The participating families emigrated from the following countries of origin: India (2 participants), Hong Kong, the Middle East, Cameroon, and Poland. Religious affiliations of the six participating families included: Sikhism, Shi'a Islam, Judaism, Chinese Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Polish Roman Catholic. Of these, two of the families (Shi'a Muslim and Jewish) considered themselves as predominantly "non-practicing" and described their spirituality in terms of beliefs and values practiced in the home, rather than religious teachings or rituals (secular frameworks). All of the participating families immigrated to Canada before their children were born and were literate and fluent in English. Thus, no families required or requested the use of an interpreter for the research process. Although information was not specifically gathered regarding the participating family's current socioeconomic status, all parents spontaneously reported being university educated with at least one adult in the home having a secure career and current employment.

Of the six parent-child dyads, four families preferred to conduct the interviews in their home for convenience. The remaining two dyads requested a private room at the University of Alberta Education Clinic in order to observe the interview process between the researcher and their child. These two families were also the ones who self-identified as spiritual but non-practicing in their religious affiliations. In both cases, the observation was requested out of a reported "interest" in the process and in their child's responses, rather than out of expressed concern for the content of the interview, although this may have been the case as well. As such, these interviews were conducted in a private room designed for play therapy that is fitted with a one-way glass and attached viewing room for observation purposes. This room was used for the first and second interviews with both children. The following paragraphs provide a brief introduction to the parent-child dyads who participated in this study.

Participant introductions. Olek is a six year old boy of Polish-Canadian heritage. Olek was born in Canada to Mira and her husband, Eryk, who immigrated to Canada from Poland via New York in 1985. Olek is the eldest of two children. His younger brother, Anthony, is three years of age.

Olek participated in the study with his mother, Mira. Mira explained that both she and Eryk were raised with a very strong Polish-Catholic religious influence and have raised Olek with the moral and cultural teachings of their faith, an awareness of God and practices such as prayer, and attendance of Church on holidays. Since moving to Canada, Mira noted a decline in their family's daily religious practice, although they still identify themselves as Polish-Catholic, and consider spirituality to remain an important part of their lives.

Rosie is a four year old girl whose parents first migrated to Canada from Hong Kong in 1987 as students, and then later made their immigration permanent. Rosie and her elder brother, who is six years of age, were born in Canada and currently live with both of their parents. Rosie's mother, Sara, who participated in the study, identified the family as Chinese-Catholic and explained the importance of daily religious practice and regular Church attendance for the family. Sara also emphasized the importance of maintaining their Chinese cultural traditions, language (Cantonese), and community ties through their involvement with the Chinese Catholic Parish.

Tanner is a five year old boy born in Japan to Lisa and Norman, who were employed there at the time of Tanner's birth. The family left Japan in 2001 for a short stay in New York before moving to Canada in 2003. Norman, who participated in this study, was born in New York to immigrant parents from Iran and Eastern-Europe who relocated several times during Norman's lifetime to countries outside of the United States. Tanner's mother, Lisa, was born in Germany and migrated to Canada with her family during her childhood. Spiritually, Tanner has been partly influenced by both religious frameworks of his grandparents, Jewish and Roman-Catholic, as well as the spiritual beliefs of his parents. Specifically, Norman explained that he and Lisa are raising Tanner from a secular perspective that is informed both by humanitarianism and science.

Emilee is a five year old girl of Cameroon heritage born in France. She is the eldest of three girls, who are ages three and 6 weeks born to Marie and Jonas. Jonas, who participated in this study, explained that he and Marie left Cameroon to pursue their educational ambitions in France and Belgium, respectively, with plans to return to Cameroon upon completion of their training. Given the economic situation in Cameroon, the couple decided to remain in France for work and subsequently moved to Canada in 2003 with the intention of improving their family's English skills. Spiritually, Jonas explained that he values moral teachings but does not follow any particular religious framework, despite being raised Protestant. Marie is raising the girls within her spiritual tradition of Catholicism. Consequently, the children are exposed to moral and spiritual teachings from both parents, have an awareness of God, and attend Church on occasional Sundays and most holidays.

Jayin is a four year old boy of Punjabi-Indian heritage who currently lives at home with his mother, Serena, and older brother, who is seven years of age. Jayin's parents are divorced and he sees his father, who is also of Punjabi-Indian heritage, every other weekend. Serena explained that both she and Jayin's dad immigrated to Canada from India during their childhood. Spiritually, Jayin has been raised with both his mother's religious upbringing of Sikhism as well as his father's religious framework of Hinduism and is familiar with the prayers, religious celebrations, and teachings of both faiths. However, since Jayin spends most of his time with his mother, Serena explains that he is more familiar with the religious teachings and practices of Sikhism and attends the Gurudwara more often than the Hindu Temple.

Kushi is a four year old girl of Indian-Muslim decent and currently lives at home with both of her parents, an older sister who is seven, and a younger brother who is two years of age. Her mother, Nagma, who participated in the study, was born in Gujarat, India and migrated to Canada with her husband in 1998. Spiritually, the children are being raised Ishnashari Shi'a Muslim, which Nagma explained is the religious framework that her husband was raised within. She herself, raised as a Sunni Muslim, identifies more with secular principles of humanitarianism and defines her personal spirituality accordingly. Thus, the children are being raised with an awareness of humanitarian ethics as well as a concept of Allah, teachings of the Qu'ran, and regular attendance to Mosque for prayers.

Gathering the Data

Learning for this study was acquired through personal reflection, consultation and contemplation via meditation and journaling as well as through direct and indirect interactions with the participants such as conducting and reviewing interviews, documenting observations made, photographs taken, and artifacts made by the children. These pathways of learning are considered in the sections to follow.

Role of the Researcher

In this study, as described eloquently by Merriam (1998), the researcher is "the primary instrument for data collection and analysis; data is mediated through a human instrument, the researcher, rather than through an inanimate inventory, questionnaire, or computer" (p. 7). This position requires extreme presence of the researcher and a level of self and other awareness that demands attention and conscientiousness throughout the research process (Merriam, 2002). With this awareness, the study was initiated with the immediate consideration of two personal questions: (1) Am I available to this research? (2) How will I know this to be the case? As it turned out, the answers to these two questions were not static and needed re-evaluation throughout the research process starting with participant selection through to the creation of the present document. This evaluation was predominantly conducted through journaling, meditation, and consultation.

Upon initiating this research, I felt as though I understood my role as the researcher and the depth of commitment and passion needed to invest in the process. That is, I initiated this endeavour with the commitment for and awareness of the exceptional project at hand and the strength that would be required to trust the data, to know myself, and to give of myself to the research. In addition, I recognized the subjective nature of the research process and the influence my own "pre-understandings" and personal experiences would have on the entire process (particularly my personal use of spirituality and past childhood spiritual experiences). As well, I was cognizant that each interview may affect me and change my research direction, as described by the hermeneutic circle and spiral.

What I did not expect and was not initially prepared for was the impact the participants' expressed spirituality would have in my personal life and in turn, the impact of my personal life would have on pursuing this particular area of study. Specifically, as I began to interact with the participants in this study and experience their views of spirituality, I was awed and humbled by their wisdom. My view of children and their overall capacities began to expand and deepen, which was a wonderful personal experience. Although I was not surprised by my experiences with them, I certainly did not expect them. On a personal level, during the completion of the interviews with the children and the documentation of their stories, I experienced two repeated miscarriages. This consecutive unfolding of children's spirituality and my own losses of developing children challenged my ability to be completely present for the research for some time. I felt both a deepening of my grief while simultaneously understanding and surrendering to my experiences and the will of the developing fetus. In particular, I was challenged by the children's views and memories of their lives prior to birth and in utero, which will be discussed further in the results section.

To understand and document every stage of this research process I relied on journaling and meditation as vehicles to self-reflection and self-awareness. Journaling was also used to document the research process and my own experiences while engaging with the participants. This was an active and conscious process that strengthened my availability to this research and my understanding of the data.

Journaling

Clandinin & Connelly (1998) observed that the use of a research journal provides documentation of the situation and the meaning of that situation as it is shaped by the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Moreover, "the researcher's notes are an active reconstruction of events rather than a passive recording, which would suggest that the events could be recorded without the researcher's interpretation" (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, p. 5). Consequently, researchers "have found that keeping a journal, diary, or log can be very helpful for keeping a record of insights gained, for discerning patterns of the work in progress, for reflecting on previous reflections and for making the activities of research themselves topics for study" (van Manen, 1998, p. 73). Thus, in this study, my research journal was kept to document physical settings, contact dates, participant observations, my evolving interpretations, understandings, musings, and analysis of both the participants and the data. As well, I documented my reactions, comments, curiosities, and personal challenges throughout the entire research process. Also, given that all of the participants expressed their spirituality verbally, as well as non-verbally (e.g., through actions, drawings, artifacts) I also used other forms of representation such as photographs and personal drawings in my journal to document my reactions and experiences (Eisner, 2003). In addition to personal journaling, it was also critical for me to discuss aspects of the research process and the personal challenges I had experienced related to my miscarriages with my research supervisors. This occurred throughout the various stages of data collection and analysis.

Interviewing

In addition to journaling, data related specifically to the participants' spirituality was accumulated through in-depth interviews with the children and contextualized by the interviews with their participating parent. As Dexter (1970), cited in Lincoln and Guba (1985), suggested "an interview . . . is a conversation with a purpose" (p. 268). Thus, these interviews were structured to elicit the participants' conceptions, experiences, and meanings of spirituality in their lives, particularly when understanding and adjusting to adverse life events.

The process of interviewing the child participants was not linear and its intention was not simply to access information. Instead, the intention of the qualitative interviews was to create *time, space, and genuine curiosity* for authentic discussions and experiences that were deep and reflective (Ellis, 1998; McLeod, 2001; Merriam, 2002). To facilitate this intention, it was often helpful not to ask direct questions about the experience of interest and instead to create an opportunity for the children to reflect upon and express their spirituality by taking on the position of the curious learner (Koepfer, 2000). This was particularly important during the interviews with the children where the content was personal and where they often expressed ideas and views unfamiliar or unknown to the adults in their lives. Being an adult then, it was also important to create a position of equality between myself and the participants where I was respectful and completely non-judgemental of their views. Furthermore, given the varied nature of spiritual experiences and their expressions it was also essential not to limit the children's disclosures to predefined ideas or categories through the use of highly structured or focused questions (Hay & Nye, 1998). With this in mind, the guiding research questions were not intended to predict, to evaluate, or to explain a particular experience, rather to understand the meaning of the experience to the participant. The questions were intended to elicit thick-descriptions for interpretation.

This evolving process is reflected in the hermeneutic circle and spiral previously described. The role of the researcher, the interview process and the direction of research are considered to be in an evolving ebb and flow guided by the researcher, the participant and their resulting relationship. The hope for the researcher according to Ellis (1998) is to establish a "fusion of horizons" or an understanding of another's viewpoint from your own. As described earlier, 'horizon' represents one's standpoint or position in terms of time, place, gender, ethnicity, culture and what we are trying to understand (Scott & Usher, 1999). 'Fusion' occurs through an understanding, which comes from both the position of the researcher and the participant. This is a shared, intersubjective meaning between those involved. This process of collaborative knowledge is further emphasized in Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) discussion of voice in narrative research, where the author's state that "the researcher needs to be aware of constructing a relationship and a story in which both voices are heard" (p.4). From this view, the interviews themselves became the story of the knowledge, as it best represented the fusion of horizons experienced and allowed both the voice of the participant and the researcher. This is discussed further in the sections to follow.

Understanding and Responding to the Data

Analysis in basic qualitative inquiry is an on-going process during data collection and interviewing. The process of the inquiry itself informs data analysis by stimulating direction for future inquiry. As stated earlier, the researcher's openness to interpretation and commitment to exploration fuels good data analysis. According to Merriam (1998), data collection and data analysis in a qualitative research paradigm are not mutually exclusive. Lincoln and Guba (1985) concur with Merriam, arguing that "data analysis must begin with the very first data collection" (p. 242).

Therefore, inductive analysis begins with the data is not necessarily theory driven. As well, the data analysis begins "while the interviewing was still under way" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 226). In this way, data analysis informs the process, style and content of the research as explained in the hermeneutic circle.

Through the process of interpretive inquiry, the data in this study was perceived as an unfolding spiral (Ellis, 1998). The spiral was composed of a series of backward and forward arcs that propel the exploration and depth of the data collection. Each loop represented a distinct element of the study, whether that element is a new or refined question, a data collection, a data analysis activity, or a new way of viewing a particular data set (Ellis, 1998). Initially, the first loop of the spiral of this study was the purpose of the study, being to understand the conceptualization, experience and meaning of spirituality among immigrant children adjusting to adverse life events. The next loop involved the modification of the initial understanding of adversity which differed among the parents and children interviewed. The next several loops involved the exploration of relevant literature, components of spirituality that were unanticipated by the researcher, and immersion in the data itself.

During this process, expected and unexpected findings were revealed from the inquiry. Ellis (1998) describes unexpected findings as "surprises", known in hermeneutics as *uncoverings* that may not lead directly to a solution, but often enable a researcher to understand the problem or question differently. When this occurred, it informed the next step in the inquiry process and the interview questions and format utilized. This impacted how the interviews were conducted, how the data was re-viewed and how the additional interviews were conducted so to further explore these uncoverings. The entire process together informed the analysis of the research.

Other important areas of analysis involved the consideration of alternate interpretations of the data by actively seeking and testing other theoretical and conceptual frameworks against the researcher's own interpretation. Guba and Lincoln (1994) further discussed the importance of searching for gaps, contradictions, and inconsistencies in one's data in order to challenge the researcher's preferred interpretation. The process of journaling my own reactions to children's disclosures about spirituality, seeking consultation with the parents of the participants, and questioning the participants during follow-up interviews greatly assisted me in this process self-monitoring and in attempting to challenge my initial assumptions and conceptions of spirituality and its role in the participants' lives. For example, when a participant recalled a "memory" of her time spent in an "egg" before her own birth, it was important to clarify with the child and with the parent how and why this memory was formed before drawing any conclusions or making false interpretations of this experience as "spiritual". Examples of further uncoverings will be described in the results section of this document in the presentation of the interview stories. Prior to that, it is important to review the interview process that was used with the participating parent and child dyads.

Interview Process

The interview process involved the researcher working with a parent and child in each dyad. Both the parent and child initially participated in semi-structured interviews; these later evolved into more of an unstructured discussion, of approximately one hour in length. The children were also involved in arts-based and experiential activities as will be described below. The interview time frame was established in consideration of the developmental needs and attention span of children ages four through six and the fact that parents were being interviewed for contextual information only. For all six children who participated, only one parent was formally interviewed, although in many cases both parents were met by the researcher and consulted if they chose to be involved. Each set of parent(s) and child were interviewed individually and separately in order to prevent the presence of parents from influencing the children's responses. However as explained earlier, two of the six participating parents chose to watch the interview with their children in a room equipped with a one-way mirror. The remaining four parents were in the home, but not visibly present while the child interviews were being conducted. Interestingly, no child participant at any point during the interviews requested the presence of his or her parent and most preferred privacy as expressed by closing doors, whispering quietly, and confirming the distance of his or her parent's presence.

Parents were interviewed prior to their child to inform the researcher about the family situation. All participating parents declined the presence of an interpreter during the interview with the researcher, based on their declared proficiency in spoken English. However, because comprehension of a second language tends to develop faster than production, some of the parents might not have been able to convey the richness of their responses to the researcher, despite their ability to understand all the questions asked (Sue & Sue, 2003). Similarly, culture-specific ideas and explanations of spirituality may not have direct equivalents in English, and may require thoughtful re-framing by an interpreter (Dunnigan, McNall, & Mortimer, 1993). Thus, the use of an interpreter was re-offered at the time of the second interviews once the content of the study had been experienced by the participating parents but was similarly declined. It was felt that the parental interviews were completed effectively and that interpreters for any participant were not necessary.

Prior to the interview, all participating parents were provided with sample parental interview questions to inform them of the content to be discussed. The parent and child initial and follow-up interviews took place consecutively in approximately a two-hour time frame, which was expressed as the most convenient approach by all of the participants. In the two cases where interviews took place in a booked room at the university clinic, the children remained in the clinic waiting area until their parent's interview was complete.

Prior to the parent interview, the researcher was introduced to the participating child by his or her parent. The researcher explained the research process to both the child and the parent and answered any questions or concerns either had about the interview. Issues of confidentiality and voluntary participation were explained and the child was reassured that he or she may decide not to participate at any point during the interview without consequence. Finally, before initiating the child interview each child was presented with the assent form (see Appendix D) to sign.

Parent Interviews

Barnes et al. (2000) emphasized the importance of assessing parental spiritual and religious beliefs and values in order to accurately assess and interpret children's spiritual experiences. Given that spirituality is thought to be embedded in the cultural context of a child (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999), understanding their religious and cultural context would better inform the researcher's understanding of their expressed spirituality. Specific issues addressed included the parents' identified religious or spiritual affiliation, their involvement in religious or spiritual activities and practices, the positive or negative valence attached to religious/spiritual practices and experiences, their connection (if any) to organized faith-based communities, and the role of religion and spirituality in their approach to child-rearing. Obtaining this information from parents facilitated an understanding of the source of the children's perspectives and aided in the differentiation of "taught" religious practices as compared with their own unique spiritual conceptions and experiences. Barnes et al. also emphasized the need to develop an understanding of how parents' spiritual frameworks relate to their perceptions of experiences of suffering and ways of healing. As this relates directly to families' experiences with adverse life events, this consideration was also addressed. Of specific interest was the relationship between spirituality and adverse immigrant-related life events. Given this view, it was also critical to understand the immigration history and process, as well as adverse events thought to impact the child from the parent's perspective (Levenbach & Lewak, 1995; Sciarra, 1999; Suarez-Orozco, Todorova & Louie, 2002; Subota, 1986). In addition, demographic information about the families (e.g., parental ages, child age, country of origin, first language, cultural and ethnic group membership, years of residence in Canada, etc.) were gathered.

The interview process with each participating parent began with an invitation to enter a conversation with the researcher about their migration history and the challenges historically and presently affecting the family. In addition, parents were asked about family spirituality and religious affiliation and its role in the child rearing process. As the conversation evolved, the focal questions of the research were addressed through open-ended questions to engage the parent in a discussion. The researcher also provided the parents with the opportunity to ask questions regarding the purpose or process of the research. Conversational entry points and guiding discussion questions utilized across different stages of the interview are outlined below. Questions were not limited to those presented below nor did they constitute a particular timeline, rather they represent the direction of the interview in order to explore areas pertinent to the research and engage the parents in a meaningful discussion.

Immigration History

- What is your family's experience of coming to Canada (year of immigration, country of origin, conditions of exodus, and experiences since entry into Canada)?
- What are some of the challenges that you, your child, and your family have faced in the immigration process and in your life in Canada?
- What is/are the most significant challenge(s), life event(s), or change(s) that are currently affecting you and your child?
- How are you and your child impacted by these challenges, life events or changes?

Cultural and Spiritual Background

- Tell me about your cultural and ethnic background.
- How would you describe your religious/spiritual identity or beliefs?
- In what ways are you and your family involved in religious or spiritual activities or practice?
- What role has your religion or spirituality played in how you are raising your child?
- What is the relationship between your spirituality or religion and the challenges you are currently facing (follow-up questions addressed spiritual and religious interpretations and responses to life challenges)?

In describing the family's immigration process, parents may have experienced immediate or delayed distress through consciousness-raising about multiple stressors or challenges. The experience of distress among study participants was assessed during and upon completion of the initial interview as well as before, during, and after the follow-up interview. Although no participating parents expressed or reported experiencing distress during these times, the researcher provided her contact information if delayed support was requested upon completion of the interviews. One participant requested follow-up, thus a list of culturally appropriate support services and counselling referrals at low or no cost was generated for this family.

The content of the parent interviews was often shared with the child participants; particularly the culture-specific terms and views of spirituality expressed by the parents as well as their perceived adversities experienced by the children. Also, parent information was sometimes used to prompt child responses or to clarify aspects of the child's interviews. Interestingly, when this information was used, the views of the parent were not shared by the child, but encouraged the child to share his or her own interpretations and conceptualizations.

Child Interviews

The children participated in a discussion and interview intended to solicit their conceptualization of spirituality, spiritual experiences, and the role and meaning of spirituality in adjusting to their perceived life challenges. The format consisted of open-ended questions eliciting verbal discussions, play interactions, and experiential demonstrations and activities. That is, the children were often asked to or spontaneously began to represent their views through non-direct or non-verbal methods such as art (e.g., drawing, building, taking photographs, using visual aids, etc.) or live demonstrations (e.g., role-play, puppetry, sandtray, etc.).

Child participants were first introduced to the researcher by their participating parent prior to the parent interview. The child was then asked to play independently and separately for the duration of the parent interview after which the child was re-introduced to the researcher. Parents often stayed in the room for a few moments after this second introduction until the children appeared comfortable with the process. Children were then oriented to the nature of the study by the researcher because the parents were specifically asked not to reveal the purpose of the research to their children. Instead, they had been asked to explain that it was important for the child to be honest and share his/her views with the researcher. Specifically, the purpose of the study was shared with the child participants and each was assured that I was interested in his or her stories and feelings and that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. I then reminded the child that his or her responses would be shared with parents and with or without them present, whatever they preferred. The following introduction provides an example of what was generally conveyed to each of the child participants by the researcher:

> *I am hoping that during our time together today you will share what you think and feel about different parts of your life. I am really interested in learning about you, so I may ask you questions about what you say because I need help understanding your thoughts and feelings. Even though I ask you questions, it doesn't mean that there are any right or wrong answers. There are no right or wrong answers, thoughts, or feelings about anything we are going to discuss today. Also, when we are finished, you and I can tell your parents what we talked about together. Does this sound okay? Do you have any questions?*

When the child appeared comfortable to commence the discussion with the researcher, interviews often began with a non-verbal interactive activity to establish rapport and comfort with the interviewer. Depending on the age, gender, and characteristics of the child, a small craft or game was selected. After a short period of rapport building, when the research was being conducted at the child's home, a tour of the house or a specific personal space (e.g., bedroom) was requested. For the interviews conducted at the university clinic playroom, a tour of the playroom was often given, with participants given time to independently explore the contents. In both cases, the children were then asked to find a place to have our discussion where they "felt most special". This was done in order for the children to identify an area that had special significance for them. As well, throughout the interviews, the pace of the process was given to the children. This was so that a clear sense of safety and space was created in order for the children to feel comfortable with the researcher and the content to be discussed.

The interview then began with an invitation to learn more about the child's concepts of spirituality. An effort was made to open the discussion to all dimensions of spirituality discussed in the literature review including: feelings, acts, and experiences of spirituality, relational aspects of spirituality with self, other, nature, or the divine, and ideas of religious-based spirituality. Children in the target age group for this study typically classify their experiences from an emotional perspective, and rarely recall experiences chronologically or sequentially (Thomas, 2000). Thus, as expected, children's descriptions and disclosures relating to spirituality and adversity were often tangential, thematically structured, and based on emotional responses to events, rather than the events themselves. Therefore, questions used in the interview were often intended to elicit children's emotional awareness and memories of spiritual experiences and interpretations. As well, children often described unique interpretations of their spirituality that could not be captured by definitive or linear questions. Although interview questions were concrete, they were open-ended and framed in relation to specific sensory modalities and emotional experiences. Children were also given time and space to communicate their views to the researcher.

Possible conversational entry points and guiding questions that were used at different stages of the interview are outlined below. The word or name "God" or "spirit" was often replaced with the term(s) used by the child so that it was appropriate for and familiar to each individual participant. As was the case for questions asked of the parents, the items below do not depict an interview protocol, but rather represent the options used for exploring the research topics when they did not spontaneously emerge.

Sensory and Emotionally -Based Questions (Feelings and Experiences)

- What does God mean to you?
- What feeling do you have when I ask you about God? Are you happy, sad or something else?
- What thoughts do you have when I ask you about God?
- What does spirit mean to you?
- Is spirit the same or different from God? How?
- Describe what God is to you? (i.e., what colour/sound/smell/shape/ would God be?)
- Are you able to feel God? Where do you feel this? What does it feel like?
- Have you ever seen, heard, or felt something that other people didn't? Tell me about that.
- Have you ever seen, heard, or felt something that was special to you? Tell me about that.

Space Questions:

- Are there any places where special things happen to you?
- Where have you been with God?

- Where do you find God when you want to? How do you know when God is there?
- Are there times or places when it's hard to find God?
- Are their times or places when you feel really close to, or even a part of something(s) around you (natural environment, inanimate objects, spirits, ancestors, etc.)?

Acts and Behaviours:

- Are there special things you do or say to see/talk to/find God? Is there anything else that happens when you do these things?
- What do you do when you want to be with God?
- When you need God, what can you do? How do you know if it works?
- Is there anything that you can do that makes God feel close by?
- Is there anything that you can do that makes God feel far away?

Relational Questions:

Relationship with God:

- How does God know who you are?
- How do you know God?
- What is your relationship with God like?
- How do you feel about God?
- What do you talk to God about?

Relationship with Others:

- Who in your life reminds you of God? What is about him/her/ that reminds you of God?
- What is your relationship with that person like?
- Are there other people, friends (imaginary or real), characters (figures from stories, TV shows, movies, etc.) that you feel like that with?

Relationship with Natural Environment:

- Is God anywhere in nature? If so, where?
- Are there things around you that you feel remind you of God? Tell me about that.

- Are there things around you in nature that you feel connected to?

Relationship with Self:

- How do you think you came into this world? If a child's response focuses on a birth story, the following question will be asked: Where were you before that?
- What are you made of or made from?
- Tell me about any special experiences you have had when you are by yourself.

After, or in many cases along with a discussion about children's spiritual conceptions and experiences, the participating children were then invited to share information about their lives and any perceived challenges they are experiencing or have experienced. They were also asked about how their spirituality related to these life experiences. When challenges were not spontaneously offered by the child or were different from those raised by the parents, examples of challenges and adverse life events raised through the parent interviews were used as prompts.

Life Challenges

- Tell me what you find hard in your life?
- Can you tell me about a time that was hard for you and what happened?
- What about times when you feel sad, angry, or scared?
- Why do you think this happens to you?
- How does God come to know what is happening for you?
- Can God do anything about your feelings or things that are hard for you?
- Tell me about the special things that you do to make things better or to help you understand what has happened.
- Tell me about any special things your family, friends, or community does to help you.

Children were also encouraged to use non-verbal means of communication to share their perspectives and experiences across all question categories. Non-verbal methods are extremely useful strategies to elicit communication when working with children in the target age group (Axline, 1947; Brems, 2002; Broomfield, 1999). Different non-verbal options were made available to the children either by bringing materials to their home or presenting them in the play therapy room at the university. These items included: (a) craft items such as coloured pens, paper, glue, scissors, for drawing or self-creations, (b) hand and figure puppets of animals and people, (c) dolls and figurines of animals, nature, and people to be used in the sand tray (when at the university) or on the floor, (d) moulding clay, (e) various toys, props, and dress-up items, and (e) imaginary re-enactment using any of the above materials. An important component of providing indirect methods of accessing the thoughts and feelings of the participants was to ensure that *options* were provided. This is particularly true in the case of immigrant children where cultural and individual variance in expression of thought and feelings are likely to occur (Fukuyama & Sevig 1999; Sue & Sue, 2003). Thus, providing several possible methods of communication of children's spiritual experiences allowed for true freedom of expression and reflection.

Children were invited to use any of these materials to share their own experiences of spirituality but were also told that they did not need to use any of the materials if they did not wish to or were uncomfortable doing so. Sensitivity was exercised to prevent disrespecting the beliefs of some cultures and religious traditions that prohibit pictorial depictions of God or other spiritual figures (Smith, 1991; Sue & Sue, 2003). As well, children had views of spirituality that were difficult to present pictorially.

Similar to the parental interviews, children might have experienced immediate or delayed distress as a result of the interview process or could have disclosed information that necessitated referral to a culturally appropriate support service. As was the case with the parents, no child participants exhibited or expressed immediate emotional concerns during any portion of the research process. However, all of the parents were provided with the researcher's contact information in case such a need arose subsequent to our last meeting.

Additional Interviews

All participant parent and child dyads were interviewed a second time individually and separately. Follow-up interviews were approximately the same length of time as the initial interviews and were conducted to obtain additional information from both the parent and child. Specifically, the intentions of the second interview were to further elicit the depth of the participants' experiences and ideas that emerged from the first interviews as well as to respond to new questions or topics of inquiry that emerged upon researcher reflection. An additional purpose of the second interview was to provide an opportunity to validate the content of the initial participant interviews.

Recording and Handling Data

Existing research on spirituality highlights the expressional nature of many spiritual experiences and expressions, such as devotional worship and rituals, silent prayer, and meditation (Miller, 2002; Richards & Bergin, 2000). As well, as explained above, children were given the option to select materials or use demonstrations to facilitate the expression of their spirituality. Specifically, strategies such as drawing, re-enactment of spiritual rituals, and the expression of spiritual themes through play were very common across the child participants and had been identified in previous literature as important communication pathways for children (Axline, 1947; Brems, 2002; Broomfield, 1999). As a result, it was important to incorporate non-verbal information gathering techniques without interfering with the interview process (Coles, 1992; Koepfer, 2000; Piechowski, 2001).

Documents such as drawings and artistic creations used by the children to build rapport with the researcher were not kept, but were documented in the researcher's journal. However, all other documents and artifacts created during the interview process were kept by the researcher to facilitate communication during the interview process. These documents did not undergo change in the follow-up interview even if they were used to illustrate deeper thinking by the participant so that they could be examined and re-examined by the researcher (Merriam, 1998). Similarly, given that the documents appear in the natural language of the situationally-bound setting in which they were constructed, non-verbal actions and other situation specific elements were documented in the researcher's journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition to documents, actions and other artifacts such as toys or symbols used to facilitate the children's expressions were recorded and described in the researcher's journal and when possible photographs were also taken.

Parent and child interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim for analysis by the researcher. Pseudonyms selected by the participating parents were inserted in the place of identifying names in the transcripts, drawings, and play material, and personally identifying information was altered to protect each family's confidentiality and anonymity. The audiotapes are stored apart from the transcripts in a locked case in a filing cabinet at the researcher's home office. The audiotapes and transcripts will be retained for a period of five years, in accordance with the research guidelines outlined by the University of Alberta, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research.

Presentation of Findings

The presentation of the research findings did not have a predetermined plan as it was strongly felt that the format of the participating children's spirituality not be confined or restricted in any way. It was also unknown at the start of the research process how the children's spirituality would be translated to the researcher, nor how they would compare to one another's views. As the interviews began however, it became immediately clear that the interaction between the researcher and the participant during the interview process was as much a part of their expressions of spirituality and my interpretations of their spirituality as was the content of their interviews. Similarly, as each participant was interviewed, their unique expressions of spirituality were also evident. Furthermore, to report the *content* of the interviews alone without the *context* of the interviews and interactions with the researcher was also felt to minimize the total *expression and experience* of the children's spirituality as understood and felt by the researcher. Finally, it was important that the findings be presented in a way that maintained the voice of the child, given the neglect of children's own perspectives in existing research on child's spirituality.

For these considerations to be taken into account, it was felt that the best experience for the reader would have been to be a "fly on the wall" during the interviews. As this is not possible, it was thought that presenting the story of the research interviews would best encompass the voice of the child, the voice of the researcher, and the experience of the interview for the reader. As such, I have attempted to make the interview experience and process as transparent as possible. It is my wish that you will read what I heard and perhaps experience your own interpretation and understanding of the children's stories of spirituality.

Narrative analysis. It was determined through extensive thought and contemplation to create a chronological interview narrative for each child, adapting Polkinghorne's (1995) method of narrative analysis. Polkinghorne describes a narrative as a story with a distinct beginning, middle, and end, where life events and experiences of participants are presented in their original context and sequence. The researcher co-constructs a sequential narrative with the research participants to capture essential meanings embedded in their experiences and disclosures, and seeks to identify an authentic way in which to communicate each individual's story.

The interview narrative for each child begins with information gleaned from his or her participating parent about family immigration experiences, stressors viewed to be affecting the child, and family spirituality and practices, as communicated in the first parental interview. The middle of the interview narrative captures the researcher's experience of meeting the child, engaging the child in play interactions and spontaneous conversations related to life, spirituality, and experiences of adversity. Child interview disclosures related to spirituality and life challenges are presented in a question-answer format in this middle portion of the interview narratives for four reasons: (a) as a testament to the children's capacity for self-generated spirituality, given the skepticism regarding children's cognitive complexity and ability to experience and express spirituality at such a young age, (b) to demonstrate the spontaneous emergence of spiritual disclosures through play, creative interactions, and intimate life conversations, (c) to allow the reader to recognize that children's spiritual disclosures were not a response to researcher suggestion or influence and were authentic to their own understandings and experiences, and (d) to describe the children's spirituality as it emerged through relationship with the researcher. Given that the role of the child participants was best understood as co-researchers, without whom this learning would not have occurred, it was critical that the voices of the children be included in their words directly as often as possible. The end of the interview narratives focuses on the follow-up interview process, parental reactions to child interview disclosures and the process of saying good-bye to the children. The researcher's reflections and thoughts during the interview process were also made explicit throughout the interview narratives to separate researcher input from child input. Child psychiatrist and professor at Harvard University, Robert Coles (1990), who studies spirituality in children, encourages the direct presentation and documentation of children's spirituality as it is disclosed and a separation of researcher-generated and child-generated research input in qualitative research. Pseudonyms for all of the participants and any of their family members mentioned in the interviews were selected by the participating parents to maintain cultural appropriateness and anonymity in the context of the interview narratives.

Deciding what material would and would not be presented in the interview narratives was informed by the emphasis or importance placed on certain content or disclosures by participants themselves (behaviourally or verbally), literature in children's spirituality, my own experiences that were particularly meaningful or impactful, and by the areas identified by parents as particularly important views or beliefs for their children. Areas removed or summarized were largely related to creating rapport and interactions that developed into standard play as opposed to symbolic play, which was determined by shifts in the child's focus, expression, purpose, and intention of the play. Standard play is play with the purpose of having fun and often involves games with turn-taking, rules, and/or specific play stimuli (e.g., board games, play machines, etc) (Axline, 1947).

Analysis of narratives. Throughout the interview process within and across participants, patterns and themes in the children's life experiences and spirituality emerged. The process of analysis of narratives was used to reflect upon and formalize emerging themes. Polkinghorne (1995) describes analysis of narratives as a constantly unfolding process whereby participants' individual narratives are examined for salient events, experiences, and meaning units. This process takes into account parents' perceptions of key immigration challenges impacting the child, themes in child play, and child interview disclosures. A cross-participant analysis was also conducted to identify common elements among individual narratives, as well as unique experiences and areas of divergence that inform the research purpose. My perspective as both the researcher and as a child psychologist informed the interpretation of themes in the children's interviews. Central themes underlying children's interview disclosures and play interactions were identified and labelled according to their essential meanings, and were illustrated using direct quotes and descriptive passages from the interview narratives. Various sub-themes that represented the diversity of spirituality among the children were also captured in the analysis of narratives.

Study Evaluation

Qualitative researchers (Ellis, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Stiles, 1993) have emphasized the importance of study evaluation as part of the research process. In general, evaluators of qualitative research have experienced difficulty as no consistent set of criteria have been established to judge the merit of a basic qualitative inquiry. However, for the purposes of this study, there were several ways to assess its quality. At minimum, it was important that the research question was appropriate for qualitative research. The research question needed to be well situated in the literature and represent some significance to the field of children's spirituality (Merriam, 2002). As described earlier in the literature review limited research has explored children's concepts of spirituality as expressed and experienced from their own perspective. As well, research has not attempted to explore how children utilize their concepts and practices of spirituality in understanding their life or adjusting to life adversity, including those that are immigrant-related. Finally, no research has sought to understand children's spirituality from those within an immigrant-cultural context.

Ellis proposed a number of questions that she suggests qualitative researchers answer when they evaluate their research upon and during analysis and interpretation of the research endeavour. In particular, three of her questions were important to address and discuss in the context of the process and analysis of this research. Brief responses to these questions are presented below.

1. Is it plausible and convincing?

The experience and content of the children's interviews were absolutely astounding. I remember feeling that had I not experienced the interviews directly or listened to the audio recordings repeatedly, I may not have thought the children's views and expressions were plausible. However, as I continued reviewing the content, it was clear that the views expressed by the children could not be adult generated as they were expressed with thought and authenticity, were unique to each child's worldview and were profoundly creative and playful. The data, when presented using the children's voices, are undeniable and convincing, which is why the results are presented in this way throughout the interview. Re-reading or listening to the interviews remains an emotional experience for me and I am often brought to tears by their wisdom and honesty. I have no doubt that those whose eyes cross these pages will be "convinced" of its authenticity and meaning.

2. Does it fit with other material we know?

A simple response to this question is yes and no. Many researchers studying children's spirituality, as presented earlier in the literature review, have expressed a deep knowing of the capacity of children to experience spirituality; a view that has been increasingly demonstrated by research. In this way, the present research did correspond with previous findings that demonstrate children's capacity for genuine spiritual experiences. What has not been documented as of yet, is the capacity and ease at which children create their own unique spirituality (views, beliefs and practices) and the role this plays in making meaning of their lives and daily experiences. Furthermore, research with immigrant children and faith-based populations have suggested that children's early spiritual views, although fantastical and creative, are often contextualized in their religious or cultural teachings. For this study, I was prepared to contextualize the children's responses in this way; however, there was no distinct connection or influence of religious teachings for any of the children's expressed spirituality. Finally, the method of interviewing children directly (with play-based techniques) has not been used to elicit children's spirituality to date.

3. Does it have the power to change practice?

   Profoundly. The novelty of the research acquired through this study had direct foreseeable impact on theoretical and research development of children's spirituality but also in understanding children's mental health. While collecting and analyzing the children's interviews, their influence and power for potential clinical practice and theory development was intensely felt. In the interviews, children expressed deep awareness of the meaning of their lives and rituals of coping and adjusting to any circumstance. This natural pathway that each child displayed informed and activated their healing and meaning-making attempts.

In addition, the following questions were asked upon completion of the data analysis (Ellis, 1998):

1. Has the researcher's understanding been transformed?

   Beyond anticipation. In no conceivable way were the results and findings of this research expected or predicted by the researcher. I did not imagine the complexity or profoundness of the children's views, practices, and experiences of spirituality nor did I expect the impact of their spirituality on the professional, personal and spiritual aspects of my life. My understanding of this field of study and of the developmental stage of childhood has been expanded. Although I had always viewed children as teachers and treated them with reverence, I never anticipated the present depth of my admiration of their stage of life. They are insightful and wise beings in their own right.

2. Have new possibilities been opened up for the researcher, research participants, and the structure of the context?

   Yes. More questions than answers have emerged as a result of this initial exploration particularly from the perspectives of theory and development as well as clinical intervention and applicability. This view was similarly expressed by researchers present at conferences where this study has been presented. From the perspective of the research participants, both the parents and children interviewed expressed deep emotions during and upon completion of participation in this study.

From a positivist approach to evaluating research, ideas reflecting study validity and reliability have traditionally been used. In the postmodern research era, the terms validity and reliability have been replaced by a number of terms describing postmodern sensibilities (Merriam, 2002). The variability and multiplicity of these terms often lead to confusion and as a result, a set of universally accepted evaluative criteria in place of validity and reliability has not been consistently adopted. Thus, it may be useful to consider the meaning of these terms in the context of the present study, recognizing the traditional "scientific" origin of the usage of these terms.

Validity and Reliability

Merriam (2002) suggests internal validity asks "How congruent are one's findings with reality?" (p. 25). As noted earlier, the researcher is the primary instrument and the data was interpreted by the researcher through researcher observations, participant interviews, and participant documents, as well as through research journaling. As the researcher serves as both instrument and reporter, the internal validity is strengthened in this study. This is further strengthened given that the children are considered co-researchers in this study and their voice is directly used throughout the presentation of findings. External validity in qualitative research is typically determined by the ultimate readers of the study and thus may be measured by the evocative nature of the research. That is, does the research evoke emotion, meaning, or significance for the reader? External validity was sought through continual guidance of the supervisory committee and will also be based on the document reaching availability to a public audience.

Reliability is present when "the results are consistent with the data collected" (Merriam, p. 27). If there is a good fit between what actually transpired in the interview and how the data were recorded, then it is said to be reliable (Bogdan et al., 2003). Upon completion of the transcription process the parents were asked to review their transcripts for reliability of recording. Also, in three of the five intact families, the non-participating parent was asked to read the transcripts for accuracy, make any additional comments, and respond to his/her child's transcripts. Children had much of the verbal portions of their interviews read back to them and the non-verbal creations re-presented to ensure that there was agreement between the text or artwork and the children's experiences of the interview. For an added check, during follow-up interviews purposeful errors and omissions were made to the content of the children's initial interviews to ensure that children were not simply complying with the researcher or that the content of the interview was not authentic. In these circumstances all child participants consistently identified and immediately corrected the researcher's "errors". Children were also given an opportunity to expand their verbal and non-verbal contributions to their interviews during the second meeting. Drawings and artwork were also often modified and further explained at this time as well, additional non-verbal contributions were also made. The transcripts were then adapted to include the interactions of the additional interviews as well as in response to any changes that the parents or children requested. This collaborative authorship with the participants was necessary to indicate that the material presented by the researcher fit for the participants and that the writing had meaning for them (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Triangulation. Source triangulation and multiple methods of data collection were also used to ensure internal validity and reliability in this study. As there were six participants, there were multiple sources for data collection on the exploration of spirituality in children including, parent and child interviews, observation of children's non-verbal descriptions, and children's drawings, artwork, and play. According to Merriam (2002), multiple methods of data collection can use a combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis to enhance data collection and ultimately the intention of the research.

Chapter 4

INTERVIEWING OLEK

Below is a presentation of one of the six children I had the opportunity to be with and learn from through this research endeavour. Olek was not the first child I met, he was in fact, the fifth, but I decided to present our interview first. I can't be certain why this story edged its way onto paper before the others, except that it reminds me of his personality…rambunctious, eager and secure.

Introduction

Olek is a six year old boy, born in Canada to two immigrant parents from Poland. He currently lives in a large Western Canadian city with both his parents and his younger brother, Anthony, who is three years old. Olek and his mom, Mira, participated in the research directly, although I had an opportunity to meet all four members of the family.

As with each of my co-researchers, my first introduction to the family was over the phone, and in this case with Mira. Mira, who spoke with a distinct Polish accent and manner of speaking that embraced equal servings of kindness and confidence, expressed genuine curiosity and interest in the research study and quickly agreed to participate. In response to where the interviews would take place, Mira suggested that we meet at their family home as she felt this would be the most comfortable situation.

Upon arriving at the home on the evening of the first interview, I was welcomed by Mira's warm smile and immediate hospitality. As she reached out to shake my hand, two heads popped out from behind her legs: one, belonging to her son Olek and the other to his brother, Anthony. I leaned down and smiled at each of them. Both boys looked up at me and responded with bashful smiles. They then quickly darted out of sight as their mom's voice followed them instructing that they stay in the family room and play for while. Mira then turned to me with a grin and said, "The bigger one is Olek". I laughed.

Mira and I settled in at the dining room table and reviewed the terms of the research process. During this time, Mira's caring nature and jovial parenting style emerged as she successfully juggled a conversation with me and another with her boys. Our conversation involved an intimate and provocative lens into a life she had before and since the birth of her two sons. Her conversation with them? Well, she was being their mom…managing disagreements, getting their favourite movie to start, making a snack, and answering a series of questions that only she could understand. It was a privilege to be present to experience both components of her life simultaneously. I did not realize until processing the experience later that this context created a backdrop of respect and authenticity to our interview and was likely why I felt immediately at home with this family.

Immigration and Cultural Background

Mira and her husband, Eryk, immigrated to New York from Poland in 1985 with the intention of eventually moving to Canada. Mira explained,

> *You see, within the immigration program in Poland you have to have an in-between country. You have to have a third country because you are not a refugee. Because there was no political instability and no one was forcing us to escape, we had to go to a middle country before coming to Canada.*

According to Mira, the prospect of residing in the United States permanently was not feasible given the challenges placed on new immigrants to acquire a Green Card at that time. Unfortunately, she expressed, they were required to live in New York temporarily but maintained the view of eventually residing in Canada.

When asked why they decided to leave Poland, Mira explained that "it was strange really, it was because it was trendy!" She paused and then laughed before continuing. "It seems funny now that I am looking at it, but we were 23 years old, and that was the thing to do". Mira further stated that many of the young couples in Poland were choosing to explore other parts of Europe in search of adventure and more stable employment. Mira and Eryk left their respective families behind in Poland when they departed for New York. Their families, who were wary of their choice to emigrate, were concerned about Mira and Eryk's safety and whether or not they would survive in a new country. I asked Mira of the impact of their families' hesitation on their decision to leave Poland and she stated:

> *Yes, there was some hesitation. But, I didn't really think that we would stay long. It was a spur of the moment thing. I thought we would see how was life and then maybe come back after a short time. But, as it turns out, we never went back.*

As is the case for many immigrants, Olek's parents did not have a direct path to Edmonton. After being in New York for several months, Mira and Eryk were sponsored into Canada by a Polish Catholic Parish in Winnipeg. According to Mira, Poland is largely a Catholic country with religious connections all over the world whose members provide support for the integration of new Polish immigrants. The members of the Winnipeg Parish did just this for Mira and Eryk's settlement into their new life in Winnipeg by helping them find an apartment, improve their English skills, and search for employment. Mira vividly recalled their arrival to Winnipeg: "I remember it well. I remember thinking how strange it looked, especially after Europe. It was like, 'wow, where am I'? Everything was so flat and so strange looking. It was very challenging for both of us".

Although both she and Eryk had university degrees from Poland, their education was not recognized in Canada. Consequently, both took 'blue-collar' jobs to support their immediate survival. Mira explained that the couple's basic conversational English skills, as a result of their university education, allowed them to find employment quicker than other Polish immigrants without similar English skills. After rotating through several labour positions, Mira settled into a job working in child care and Eryk went to school to advance his computer skills, which later led to the training he needed to become an air traffic controller. After Eryk's training was complete, the couple became anxious to leave Winnipeg and travel West in search of "better opportunities". Thus, the couple first moved to Lethbridge for a year and then onto Edmonton in 1992 where they have resided ever since. Following their settlement in Edmonton, Olek was born in 1999 and Anthony in 2002. At present, Mira and Eryk do not have any plans to return to Poland. Mira explained that they have grown accustomed to living a Canadian lifestyle:

> *Well, you get used to living in an orderly country. Not a country that has been experiencing turmoil. You always remember what it was like to live in turmoil which is the part that keeps you strong to immigrate. We, both of us, have lived through having nothing in stores, where you had to get the necessities of life somewhere else just to survive. Where you could not*

> *depend on the government to get what you need. We became very…well if one thing doesn't work, look for another because you have to survive.*

Although living in Canada has brought the family increased security and opportunity, there were several adjustments the couple made to coping with their new lifestyle. Among these, the challenges of finding employment, learning English, and being separated from friends, family and familiarity were very difficult for Mira and Eryk. Added to this was adjusting to the weather, particularly the winter temperatures in Edmonton and the limitations to outdoor activities during these months for themselves and the children. Culturally, Mira also remarked that Canadians "take for granted that things might change…they assume that everything will stay how it is". She further explained that she finds Canadians to "expect much from their government, like they expect the government to find them things, like jobs and housing". Mira continued, "But for us, it was up to us to survive. The majority of us came with maybe a couple of hundred dollars in their pockets, no family, no housing, nothing and wondering how am I going to eat today or tomorrow." Mira paused and then said,

> *I am sure my kids will be the same way, because they have this security. I guess, you grow up with something and you become attached to it. But with me, I think, what is one less or one more? I will try to look for something else if I loose it. I think politically, countries that have changed their economic situation or have had unreliable economies would not be attached to their life or possessions.*

I was curious how Mira thought Olek would describe his own ethnic identity, or whether this was a conscious part of their parenting. When I asked if Olek conceptualized his own ethnicity, she said simply, "They do and they don't". When further explored, Mira explained that as Olek ages "he is becoming more resistant to being Polish" and that he "describes himself as Canadian". Mira paused and expressed wonder if this had to do with their infrequent visits to Poland. Since they have been in Canada, Mira and Eryk have been back to Poland only twice and only once with the children, although each of their parents visit them often in Canada. Olek does speak and understand Polish very well, although he typically answers his mother in English. And when Olek and Anthony play together, they always speak English to one another. Mira thought aloud, "maybe I haven't taught them enough about Poland?"

Mira was pensive during this discussion about her children's ethnic identity. When pursued, she explained that having the children learn and accept their Polish heritage is a continual challenge for her.

> *Because they don't have grandparents here, and we have no family in Canada, it is very difficult to teach the children about their Polish culture...they know we are Polish, but I don't think they understand really what this means. But, being in Canada, especially at their school, it is so multicultural. He knows that the children all speak different languages and look different from him, so that is not that strange for Olek.*

Mira described Olek as having a very inquisitive nature and "always wanting to know the answer to questions". She further expanded that Olek often appears quite distressed and unsettled when he is unable to find an answer that suits his curiosity. When asked about specific immigration-related challenges that Olek faces in his life, Mira stated that Olek often questions his cultural and ethnic identity, particularly with regard to differences he notices from his peers. Specifically, she said,

> *Well, he has asked a lot of questions about why our family does different things, especially around the holidays. Or, he will ask why we don't celebrate other holidays that his friends might who are from different cultures, so I guess he is curious".*

According to Mira, Olek seems aware of the diversity of his young Canadian peer group and the cultural differences expressed by his family's traditions. Nevertheless, Mira explained that he often identifies himself as "Canadian". Mira on the other hand, defines her own ethnicity as "Polish-Catholic".

Family's Spirituality, Religious Beliefs and Practices

As Mira mentioned earlier, Poland largely consists of individuals who identify themselves as Catholic. Mira further explained that Polish culture is intricately tied to their Catholic religious beliefs and practices, which ultimately formed her own identity. Although Mira and Eryk were both raised with strong Catholic influence, they do not maintain the same level of practice with Olek and Anthony today. "Well", Mira explained, "I would describe myself as a Polish-Catholic…but I am not as practicing as I should be". According to Mira, the family currently attends Church on "high-holidays such as Christmas Eve, Easter, and occasional Sundays". Mira explained that Olek is also becoming increasingly curious about the role of church and prayer and certain rituals in their lives. For example, Mira explained that Olek often asks, "Why do we go to church?", "Why does the church look like that?", "Why does the priest where funny clothes?", and "Why don't we celebrate Chinese new year?" These questions are not surprising given the cultural diversity in Olek's classroom and neighbourhood environments.

I inquired about daily influence of the family's religious beliefs and practices such as prayer and the role of God or Jesus in their lives. This was our conversation:

> Do you talk about any of the beliefs that you have been raised with in the home with Olek?
>
> *You should understand that the first immigrants from Poland, the older Polish immigrants were very, very attached to church. When I became a young person, the Church kind of started to be more political than my liking (pause), than it should be and it became very powerful. And it still is. It really is based on very old history and I am not sure whether I want someone to rule my life the way the church wants to rule.*
>
> So you are conscious about which pieces of the religion you teach to your kids?
>
> *Yes, and also, my attachment is not the same as my parents or as the older generation of Polish immigrants.*
>
> So if you leave the religious teachings out of it, what is your own philosophy that you would like to teach your children?
>
> *I don't want them to think that there is...well that is the other part about the Roman Catholic Church. That there is a higher power, but it is a very strict God that you have to obey and you have to do this and this in order for him to approve of you. No. Now, things have changed, which is pretty nice for a kid to not have to fear going to confession every mont[illegible] wouldn't like my kids to experience anything like that. Having a fear in God or in church. So, what my thoughts on it is, I can tell them what I grew up with. I am not going to force them and I would like them to choose their own religion, if they choose to have one.*
>
> So it is entirely up to them?
>
> *Yes, it is up to them.*
>
> So if right now, the kids are curious about a tragedy, or if someone passed away, or a situation like 9/11, how would your family understand or explain situations like that?
>
> *Well, most of the time, things like that are really far away from the child to be able to relate to that. Olek is very curious about those events though, he wants to know why things happen. But, because he is very, very interested in science and nature he often looks for answers in his books and in his research. He actually tries to make it close to science to understand it. As*

far as our explanations, we want Olek to know that things that are unfair happen, and that we sometimes don't have the answers to why. And, when there is a tragedy like 9/11, I don't want to get into the reasons why, because if there was a great power, then why does it happen?

So that is your own belief?

Yes, sure. That is my own challenging question so I don't want to say it to Olek because I don't know why. But, I do want them to picture religion and God in a good way, as something very positive. Not something that punishes people and that is one of the strengths that I did grow up with. Although we had someone that was watching over us, it was not unconditional. You had to follow lots of rules to get that love. And for me, it was always something that I was drawn to that. As an only child, I was happy to have it, I think it was good to have it, but as I am getting older, and I am changing paths, I am doing it now more as following tradition, rather than for my own needs. I have kind of drifted. Although, I am sure that I will come back to it at some point in my life because as things are changing, I may find more help in it. As the priest changes and how they talk to you is becoming more of a dialogue, which is very different from how I grew up.

So what about issues like death? How do you deal with that as a family?

Yes, I tell them that it is a cycle of life…actually the Disney movies are helping with that…basically I explain that people live and then they die. Well actually, Olek came up with this idea that when people die, they take the form of an animal, which he really likes because he loves nature. So, I guess, death means an end to what he knows now, but that he can come back in a different form.

So how do you feel about Olek's theory?

I have no problem with that. I can go with that if it helps him understand. I am not strictly following one path. I am taking whatever path my family needs at the time. So for us, when you grow up in a communist regime, where the government was pushing everyone away from religion, which never happened in Poland. So it actually made people stronger in their religion. So it was a very strange and interesting perspective. So on the one hand we had the political upbringing where everyone was trying to be an equal, and on the other hand religion taught us that we were God's children and had to obey his rules. Also, because it was politically wrong to go to church, as teenagers, we felt like rebels when we would go to church, so it was cool to go.

Following this portion of our conversation, Mira further emphasized the value in their family of being flexible about their spiritual and religious views and the importance of working with each of their child's beliefs to help them view and understand the world. Throughout our interview, I was increasingly impressed by Mira's openness to Olek's inquiring mind and his genuine and deep wonderment about many existential questions. I was excited in anticipation of my discussion with Olek so I asked Mira for a formal introduction to him.

Meeting Olek

After our initial and brief doorway encounter, I had seen Olek dart in and out of rooms in the house with occasional interest expressed in the conversation his mom and I were having. Mostly, he seemed pre-occupied with other activities and interests around the house. When he was called to meet me, he ran up to the dining room table from the family room with a huge smile on his face sneaking occasional peaks and smirks my way. I let Mira introduce us and briefly explain to Olek that he was to spend some time with me answering questions that I had for him.

With his mom sitting at the table, Olek and I started talking about what he had been doing since I had arrived to their home. This was a discussion Olek was quick to engage in and ignited our conversation immediately. His younger brother, Anthony, was also quick to join and engage in conversation. The three of us then spent some time playing with one another. As both had expressed a curiosity about the tape recorder we spent some time recording and listening to our voices on the tape recorder saying silly things and singing songs. This seemed to amuse the boys a great deal and eased their level of comfort with me. I too, was having fun and following their lead. We then spent some time coloring, while Mira walked in and out of the dining room area, engaging with the boys and me with smiles and laughter. After about 15 minutes of this casual play, I introduced the research process to Olek and went over the contents of the assent form, to which Olek agreed. I then asked Olek to take me to the room in the house where he "felt the most special" and where "special things happened" for him. He said with wide eyes and a bright smile, "I know just where to take you!" Almost immediately after, he started gathering up my supplies and excitedly urged me to hurry my pace. He grabbed my knapsack and led the way up the staircase to his bedroom looking back to ensure that I was following. I responded with a huge smile and happily hurried to catch up.

When he opened the door to his bedroom, he looked up at me and asked with an eager expression, "Do you like it?" With genuine agreement, I bent over and looked at Olek directly in the eyes and said, "Oh, yes! It is a wonderful room, Olek". He seemed to like this comment very much as he proceeded with a spontaneous tour of his room. The room was average in size and coloured in tints of blues and greens. There was a small bed, a desk, and several shelves full of books and some toys and games. It was a warm, comfortable room that looked loved and lived in…one, I thought, that welcomed me and our topic of conversation well.

Olek then shut the door and we sat down on the floor of his bedroom and talked about everything that met my eyes. The first thing I noticed was the number of snake-themed ornaments around the room as well as a small glass case with an orange and black snake curled up by a rock (see Figure 1).

Tell me about your snake…what kind of snake is it?

He's a corn snake.

Wow, he is really cute. (I knelt in front of the case trying to get a better look. With my eyes as close to the case as Olek's, I peered in stretching my face to see around the rock). You can hardly see him. (Olek gently tilted my face in the direction of his pet snake directing my gaze towards it). Oh, that's better! Wow, he is really cool looking.

Yeah (He knelt beside me looking adoringly into the glass case). He's a really nice snake.

Figure 1. Olek's Pet Snake

Did you pick him yourself?

Yes, I got him on October 1st. He's only four months old.

How big will he get?

When he's all grown up he's going to be 6 feet!

Wow, that is pretty big!

Our conversation continued in this manner regarding his pet snake and other noticeable artifacts around the room. It was clear that the world Olek had created for himself in his room was one which deliberately welcomed nature, particularly animals and reptiles. His room was full of stuffed life-like animals, nature books, charts and other animal-themed contents. Olek was enthusiastic and excited to discuss these topics.

Olek's curious and inquisitive personality emerged throughout our conversation. What moved me most was the calm confidence with which he expressed this curiosity – like a problem that had a solution he just hadn't found yet. There seemed to be a deep rooted security underlying his questioning and his search for knowledge, for truth. This comforted and amazed me. This way of being was also evidenced in his engagement with me. He was extremely present and aware throughout our conversation and seemed to be very invested in me understanding and listening to him. My curiosity and his interest often placed Olek in the role of a teacher informing me of facts about certain animals and confirming these with references from the books around his room, with statements often starting with, "do you know about…"? When I did not, which was often, he expressed great interest in ensuring that I would know the answer soon enough. Since the world of animals and nature is far removed from my mind's encyclopaedia, I welcomed the instruction.

Explanation of Death

About 15 minutes into our conversation, I felt a level of comfort and connection with Olek that I predicted might permit more direct questions about his spirituality. Hence, I decided to ask Olek directly about his views about death that Mira had shared with me earlier, to examine how his beliefs about the "circle of life" might reveal his conceptions of spirituality.

> So, when I was talking to your mom downstairs, we were talking about lots of different things and she said that you know what happens when people die. Can you tell me about that?
>
> *Yeah, they turn into animals.*
>
> I think that is really cool, can you tell me more about that?
>
> *Well, I don't know very much about it.*

So, when people die, they turn into animals?

Yeah.

Can they turn into any kind of animal they want?

Yeah, they turn into every kind of animal in the world.

So was this snake (pointing to Olek's pet snake) a person before?

I don't know.

What do you think?

Maybe.

Do you ever talk to him?

Yes.

What does he say?

Usually, he just says hello.

How do you know that he is talking to you?

I can sort of hear him in my head.

Oh. What does he sound like?

Like a normal snake.

And what does a normal snake sound like?

Just like you, but softer like this...(he whispers very softly).

Has he always spoken to you?

Yes, from the first day he came here.

What else do you talk about?

I tell him lots of things, but he mostly just listens.

In the above conversation, Olek initially spoke with some hesitancy, particularly when he revealed being able to "hear" his snake in his head. My impression was that he was unsure how the information would be received. Would I believe him? Would I correct him (e.g., say that snakes don't talk)? Aware of his hesitancy, I leaned closer to the snake cage, peered inside with deep interest and belief and asked the remaining questions. Olek seemed to immediately take this as support, leaned in to the glass as well and spoke with enthusiasm and courage for the remaining conversation. I knew then, that I could go further and ask him more about his re-incarnation theory.

So, if you could be an animal, what would it be?

I would be a snake.

Wow, that is really cool.

Well, I would want to pick from the longest to the shortest.

So what would you pick first?

Well, if I wanted to be from the longest I would be the reticular python.

Wow, that is a cool big snake!

Yeah! And if I was from the smallest snake, I would be thread snake. And if I was from the heaviest, I choose the green anaconda.

That is a very interesting snake.

That's this one here (Olek walks over to his bed and points to a very large green stuffed animal snake with black lines laying on top of his bed amongst other snakes). See, this one is the green anaconda.

Figure 2. Olek's Anaconda

So what would you do if you were a green anaconda?

I would go to the Amazon, because that is where I would live and I would hang out with the reticular python because they are really cool.

So what would life be like as a snake?

It would be so good! Because the reticular python has no enemies and if I was hanging out with him, then we could just spend our day exploring.

So, if you could be a snake today, would you?

Yeah! I would do it for my whole life. It would be fun. If you could explore the whole world of animals, that would be the best!

Olek spoke a little more about living in the animal world and what it would be like to explore the forest as an anaconda and visit other "animal groups". He described spending his days watching the animals and figuring out how they spent their time. I found myself very easily and quickly joining in his enthusiasm, like a child listening to a wonderful story. He brought out books to show me pictures of the animals he was describing and illustrated the Amazon as though he had travelled there many times before. I was mesmerized. I wanted to know what it was about the animal world that was so appealing to Olek.

So animals are really important to you, hey? Animals and nature. What do you like so much about animals and nature, Olek?

Well, animals, well when an animal dies, it turns into energy. Like it keeps on going and going and going and going and never stops.

So, when an animal dies, their body…

When an animal dies, their body gets eaten and eaten by worms and other bugs, it's called the food chain, and that's how energy travels from animal to animal. That's why I like nature and animals so much. And all of the animals when they are alive are pretty amazing too.

So where do we fit in?

Well, I guess we are kind of like that. Yeah, because we eat chicken and the chicken eats grains from the ground, so I guess we are part of the food chain too. So a farmer grows vegetables with seeds and water and sun and then the farmer takes out the vegetables and then we chop it up and eat salad. See!

Yes, I do understand, that's neat…So, do you think that it is okay for people to die then?

Yeah. It's okay to die because of the circle of life and then we become the animals.

I don't really understand how we become animals, can you teach me?

Yeah (Olek stands up and acts out his description). Okay, so when you die, your arms fall off and your legs become together and your head stretches and then you become a snake. And your spine bone stays in but it stretches and becomes long because it is the bone that protects us.

So does that all happen before or after you die?

It happens after you die. So, you die and then you get buried. Then, the dirt turns your body into the animal. See?

So how does the dirt change the body into the animal?

It grinds it up (Olek moved his hands together in grinding motion).

So how does the dirt know what animal to turn you into?

What do you mean?

Well if you want to turn into a snake and I want to be something else, how does the dirt know what animal to make you?

What animal do you want to be when you die?

Ummm....maybe a bald eagle?

Well, a bald eagle, a bald eagle...hmmm...well I guess the dirt would need to make your arms into wings and your face into a beak and stuff.

So how does the dirt know what to do?

God knows what you want to turn into.

God knows?

Yeah and then because God controls everything, so then he tells the dirt whatever you want to be.

Understanding and Utilization of God

His introduction of God to this scientific re-incarnation mythology was notable and I wanted to know more about it. So, I decided to shift the questioning to God in attempt to better understand this concept for Olek.

So the God that controls everything, where does he live?

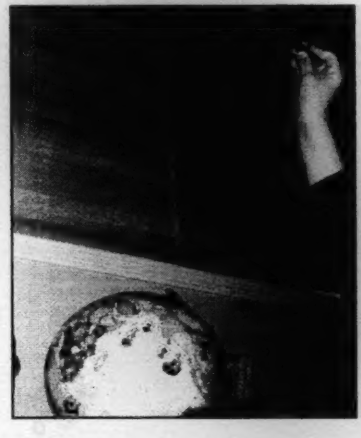
Well, (Olek takes my pen and walks over to a large model Globe sitting on his desk and places the pen about 2 feet above the globe)...right here.

So, far above the earth?

Yeah and this is the God that controls every country. He is called the Big God.

What do you mean?

Figure 3. Olek's Demonstration of Where "Big God" Lives.



Well, there are other little Gods all over the world who live in fancy houses and have really cool things. Like the God who lives in Brazil, he has a really cool house made of butterflies and flowers. See where Brazil is? (Olek points to Brazil on his Globe)

What a beautiful sounding house. So there are other Gods?

Yeah, there are lots and lots of other Gods.

So what is the difference between all of the Gods?

They are all different. The first God is called special, and the next one is called control, and the other one is called protector. They all have different names like that.

That is so interesting. Do they all live in butterfly and flower houses?

No, all of their houses are different. Like the one in India...here (Olek points to India on the globe)... lives in a house where every inch there is a model of a king cobra, every inch!

Wow, that is so cool! So Olek, what do the little Gods look like?

They all look different and some are girls and some are boys, they are all different. See, you can take this fancy express train everywhere and anywhere you want to go to visit them all over the world. (Olek slides his finger across his globe from country to country).

Can you tell me more about the 'fancy express train'?

Yeah. It is this special train that goes all over the world, it flies and goes over water too and you can take it every time you want to visit a God.

Have you ever taken the 'fancy express train' to visit one of the Gods before?

Yeah, I like to go to their houses because they are so nice.

So you can go wherever you want to visit them?

Yeah.

When do you usually go on the 'fancy express train'?

Usually at night time.

Does anyone ever come with you?

No, just me.

Do you like it like that?

Yeah, I like going by myself. It's quieter like that.

So Olek, what kinds of things do you visit the little Gods for?

Well, sometimes I go to give thanks. Like if there are things to say thank you for.

Like what?

Like my brother, and my parents, and having food and friends, stuff like that.

And which God do you say thank you to?

The Polish God. He lives in Poland (Olek points to Poland on the globe).

What else do you visit the little Gods for?

Mostly just to visit and have fun.

Are there any special times when you visit God?

Well sometimes we go to church on Easter, but I mostly like to take the train to visit their houses instead.

Is there any other times you visit the little Gods?

Sometimes I ask the Big God for help and stuff.

What kind of stuff?

Like to go on the monkey bars without falling and I did that once and I got all the way to the bottom without getting hurt.

Does that help you?

Yes, it always helps me.

How come?

The Big God always listens to me and tells me how to feel better or how to do things good.

Almost like a friend?

Yeah, like a good friend.

Have you ever heard the Big God?

Sometimes I hear him.

What does it sound like?

Like a human voice.

And where do you hear it?

In my brain.

What does he say?

Lots of things to help me and to feel better and he teaches me lots of things.

Wow. That's really interesting. Does the Big God come into your brain to talk to you, or do you have do something first?

Big God is always in my brain. Anytime I have a question to ask him, his voice comes in my brain.

How did the Big God get to live up above the Earth like that?

The big God has always been there. Forever and forever and forever.

What about the little Gods?

I think they existed since the dinosaurs. It's history.

So in history, who came first?

The Big God has always been there, then the little Gods, then the dinosaurs...I'll show you. (Olek brought out a book of evolution with the map of creation from amoeba, to multi-celled organisms, etc.) See, the explosion came first, then this came, then this...(pointing to the map).

So before this, and before the explosion, where was Big God?

He existed already and he made the first explosion happen.

Olek went on to describe many other Gods in various countries around the world and their beautiful houses. He explained that he has had the opportunity to visit many of them already, but not all. I was fascinated by the detail he provided about their homes, wardrobe and appearance. I wondered about the source of all of his 'information' at first, but quickly became re-captured by the gestalt of his mythology. He had explained that there was a "Big God" that controlled all of the "little Gods" and I wanted to learn more about how this system worked.

Olek, can you tell me more about the Big God you spoke about earlier?

Yeah. The Big God lives way up here in the air (Olek points to the space above the globe again), and he controls every small thing.

Does he have a house?

He lives in any cloud he wants.

And what does he look like?

He looks very, very big.

Does he look like a person, like you and me?
Sometimes. He looks however he wants to look, but very, very big.

Okay. So how does he control things?

His arms are so long, that he can control every God in every city on Earth.

When does he do that?

Whenever anyone needs anything. Every God in the cities and countries takes equal time of 5 minutes and then the other Gods stays down there (on Earth) while one God has a meeting with the Big God up in the sky.

So all the Gods don't have their meetings together?

No, just one little God at a time.

What kinds of things does the Big God talk about in his meetings?

Things that they have to do to help their country and new things like new foods and new things (be)cause everything has to get new so that the people in Earth don't get bored.

So the Big God controls all of that?

Yeah.

So have you ever met the Big God?

Maybe, I don't remember. But I met the Edmonton God at church.

What is the Edmonton God like?

He speaks Polish and English and he wears like a dress cloth that was golden on the outside and red and orange outside.

As he was describing what I assumed was the Polish-Catholic priest at his church, I was less interested in the accuracy or source of his information, but instead how he put the information together to understand the world. This desire to make sense of his world and the role of God, or Gods in the world was definite and self-initiated. I wanted to explore the depth of his worldview so I continued to ask more questions about the local little Gods and existential Big God. Olek went on to explain that none of the little Gods or the Big God ever dies and that they are "always around". This eternal definition of God fascinated me. Not only for the symmetry with many world religion teachings, but conceptually in Olek's understanding of the world around him.

Understanding of His Own Origin

Olek had come up with a way to explain the immortality of his own existence as "energy" being transferred in form (i.e., animal into human into animal) as well as the eternal existence of God. I pondered if Olek had any memory or created memory of life before his human form as part of his personal story?

So Olek, where did you come from?

My mommy's tummy.

Where were you before mommy's tummy?

In space.

Where in space?

Up there (points to the sky outside his bedroom window) floating around in space, I was a ghost.

You were a ghost before you were in mommy's tummy?

Yes, everyone was a ghost before. Everyone is a ghost-spirit before they are born.

And what does it mean to be a ghost or a ghost-spirit?

A ghost-spirit means that you are light and live in the sky and space.

Are you still a ghost-spirit?

No. I only have the spirit left in my body.

Where do you feel that in your body?

I just know it's there, I don't really feel it anywhere

Where would I find it in your body?

It's just inside.

All over or somewhere specific?

All over.

Okay. So when you are a ghost-spirit, can you explore anything in the sky that you want?

Yes, like you can explore all the planets and whatever you want. I think I explored Jupiter and Saturn and a star and a Sun.

So do you remember all of that?

No, no one remembers all of it.

But do you think you do?

I just know I went to Jupiter because Jupiter is my favourite planet.

That is so cool. So what is Jupiter like?

It has moons and blue and yellow gases and red gases floating around all over the place. It was a really, like if you were down on Earth and there were all of these mysterious clouds around you, that's what it was like.

So was there anyone else with you on this expedition?

Maybe there were some other ghosts on it with me I don't remember, maybe my brother?

Do you think you knew your brother as a ghost?

Yes, but he was a ghost too.

So, when you were a ghost, did you have a body like this that you could touch and feel?

Yeah, but it was lighter, like brighter.

So what did you look like?

I look older than I look now, but mostly the same.

What about your brother, did he look like he does now?

Yes. Mostly everyone does and then they change and they are mostly the same as they were when they were a child. Mostly everyone looks the same like when they were a child.

So when did you decide to go to into your mom's tummy?

The Big God decided.

Do you remember being in your mom's tummy?

No, I don't remember anything.

What is the first thing you remember?

I remember crying and being in the hospital and then getting washed. I remember I didn't like that and I was crying. I remember being dressed in the hospital clothes and then coming home in our old car that was a navy blue car. And then we had a blanket that was in my dad's navy blue car and then I just got older and older and older and finally I am this old.

As I listened to the conviction in Olek's voice as he spoke, I found myself wanting to delineate what Olek truly remembered versus what he had now used to create his memory and understanding of his own birth story. So, I later relayed this story with Olek's mom, who explained that she has a picture of herself holding Olek as a newborn wrapped in a blanket standing beside their old navy blue car, which she believes she has likely shown to Olek. Interestingly however, she did not recollect telling him anything about crying or being washed as a baby at the hospital, and became emotional reading this part of his story.

Shortly after this conversation, we ended the first interview and spent about fifteen minutes playing and colouring together with Olek's younger brother. I wanted to ask Olek more about his views about his life adversities as he had mentioned asking the "Big God" for help at times. However, Olek and I had already spent over one hour together and I did not want to pursue any more at this point. Although neither of us appeared tired and the time seemed to pass quickly, I felt that it would be most appropriate to stop. This decision was welcomed by his brother, Anthony who was happily waiting for the two of us to play with him again. When his brother entered the room, the feeling and tone of the interaction shifted to one that was less sacred and peaceful to one that was silly and fun. Somehow, the trance that I was in with Olek broke when Anthony came into the room and we were all "child-like" again. Leaving Olek's home that day, I knew that he and I had experienced something unique and significant and I wondered if he felt the same way.

Second Meeting

Two weeks later, I approached the door and rang the door bell of Olek's home for our second meeting with anticipation and excitement to spend more time together. I saw, through the glass in the front entrance, a small silhouette appear and disappear quickly. And then, a long, loud, "Moooommm! It's Farah!" I smiled and waited for the door to open. I was met, this time, by both Olek and his brother wearing very cozy-looking pyjamas. Their faces wrapped with huge smiles and their bodies wiggling and jumping in anticipation of my entrance. As soon as I stepped over the threshold, I was greeted by two very large and genuine hugs across my legs, which I bent over and accepted with sincere joy.

After we greeted each other, I realized that it was Eryk who had opened the door. I looked up embarrassingly and introduced myself to him. We were joined in moments by Mira, who welcomed me back into their home. Eryk and Mira and I spoke briefly before I asked the both of them to review the transcript of the first interview with Olek as well as the transcript of my time with Mira. I let them know that I would speak with them in more detail after I had a chance to talk again with Olek. I then quickly followed Olek back up to his bedroom, who had already swung my knapsack around his shoulder and gestured me to follow. Anthony quickly followed. Before I had a chance to speak, Olek put his hand on his young brother and said, "Anthony, we'll play with you after, okay? This is my special time with Farah". I was moved by his insight and kindness. He shut the door and then turned to me and said, "Are we going to talk some more about animals and God?" I smiled and nodded.

Adversity and God's Magic Powers

I started by asking Olek to further explain the role of the little Gods and the Big God in his life, particularly in relation to difficult life circumstances. Initially, I also wanted to understand how Olek would define "good things" and "bad things" that happened to him and in the world. The following was our conversation:

What are some bad things that happen in the world?

Like a car crashes and accidents.

And what are some good things that happen in the world?

Making friends and having fun.

Okay. So what are some bad things that happen to you in the world?

When I get in trouble from my mom.

What for?

For doing things that I am not supposed to be doing.

Like what?

Like fighting with my brother and getting mad.

How does that make you feel?

It makes me feel very sad when I hurt my brother, I feel hurt

What other times do you feel sad or hurt?

Sometimes I feel sad when I can't do things that my friends can do, like playing a game or climbing on the monkey bars at school?

Do you ever feel sad because you feel different?

No, because everyone is different. No one is the same as someone else. But sometimes I feel sad when I don't do the same things as my friends or when they have things that are better than mine, like games and things.

So what do you do when you get in trouble or feel sad or when bad things happen to you?

I try to solve it.

How do you do that?

You should talk to your mom to solve it. And then, you try to say sorry and solve it. But if you did something wrong, you should get a punishment.

So what kind of punishment would you get?

Like I might have one of my toys taken away or something.

So what about when big bad things happen or when you are really sad?

Like big problems when people fight?

Sure. What about when that happens?

Then God solves it.

How does God solve it?

With his magic powers.

God has magic powers? You never told me about this last time! Can you tell me more?

God has magic powers that can change what happens and fix things.

So, he fixes big things with people?

He helps people get happier.

Does he make you get happier?

Yeah. Sometimes he tells me what to do so that I can be happier.

Oh. So what else does he do?

He makes lower prices in stores so that I can buy the toys I want on sale.

He does? What else does he do? How does he solve all of these problems?

He does it with the little Gods and his magic. He tells them how to solve their problems at his meetings with them. Remember, the 5 minute meetings he has? But actually, I remembered it is actually only 1 second, but it feels like 5 minutes because God works super fast.

Oh. Thanks for correcting that for me. So how does Big God do his Magic?

He has magic words and sometimes he uses his giant hands to fix things...like that.

Olek went on to explain that the 'Big God' finds out what needs to be fixed from the 'little Gods', but also from people who need help themselves. I wondered if Olek could talk directly to the 'Big God' if he wanted to, and he confirmed that he can and does on occasion "in his head" when needed.

I noticed that although my conversations with Olek did not reveal him being impacted by cultural identity issues described by Mira, what saddened him was "not having things" that others have. There seemed to be other clues in Olek's descriptions of spirituality that also suggested that he was affected by Mira and Eryk's underemployment and financial instability in the family. For example, he attributed maintaining food and shelter for human beings to "Big God" and "little Gods" and also noted how they can lower the prices of toys, etc. so that he could afford them.

Resiliency

I remained impressed by Olek's faith in this spiritual-infrastructure he created to understand and make sense of his own existential curiosities such as the origin of creation and death, and his utilization of this infrastructure to help and resolve issues for himself and the world. I found myself questioning the strength of his belief system. If everything was "explainable", or "resolvable", did this faith ever shake?

So Olek, why do bad things happen to you?

Just because. Bad things have to happen sometimes.

They do?

Yeah. But only sometimes.

Can you think of why?

Just because it has to. If bad things didn't happen, people wouldn't know what to do to get help.

That's very interesting. So you don't think there is anything wrong with bad things happening in the world?

No.

Okay, so what is the worst thing you can imagine happening?

The world exploding

And then what would happen?

All the people would die.

And then what would happen?

It would start all over again and there would be small little cells, and then insects and animals and then us again. It would happen all over again. So it doesn't really even matter.

So, even if the worst thing happened, it doesn't really matter.

Yeah.

So how do you stay so positive?

That's just the way I think.

How is it different from the way other people think?

Most people think that you die and never come back.

So how do you think most of those other people feel?

I don't know. Maybe they are sad all the time. Or maybe scared?

Maybe. So do you ever feel sad or scared?

Only sometimes for a little while.

And then what?

And then I remember to hear Big God in my brain, remember?

Yes, I remember.

I held this thought for a moment, letting it echo in my mind a few times…"and then I remember to hear Big God in my brain, remember?" Not only did I remember; I would never forget. The comment stirred my thoughts. I wanted desperately to know how or why a six year old would say this? Was it intuitive wisdom? Was it his creativity? Was it something he overheard? And then, all of a sudden, it didn't matter. I heard a voice in my brain that said, "It is his truth".

As we approached the end of our time together, I thanked Olek for his honesty and willingness to share his thoughts and ideas. We then spent some time reviewing the content of the transcripts from our last meeting and the content from our time together today. Then, we opened the door and invited Anthony to join in with us to "play" for a while. I set the boys up with some games and crafts and went downstairs to speak with Mira and Eryk to discuss the transcripts from the initial interviews that they had reviewed.

After validating the contents of her own transcript, Mira expressed surprise and awe about Olek's transcript. She and Eryk articulated amazement at the depth and intricacy of Olek's belief system. Both parents confirmed that all of the ideas and theories explained were his own and did not come from any particular source that they could identify, including themselves and school curriculum content. Eryk and Mira also reported feeling very pleased that Olek is able to understand complicated life issues and that he has found a way to make sense of them. The couple also wanted to know if Olek's perspectives were "normal" and comparable to the "other kids in my study". I reassured them that Olek's ideas were unique, but that the creation of a spiritual mythology was consistent with my other interviews thus far.

Saying Goodbye

As I was packing up to leave, I felt overwhelmed with honour to have been a witness to Olek's unique and creative belief system and joy to have met him and his family. I thanked both the boys again and extended my gratitude to Mira and Eryk for welcoming me into their home. The boys walked me to the door while I put on my shoes and coat. As I turned to leave, Olek pulled at my arm and gestured to me to lean over. As I bent down he pulled on my shoulder and cupped his hands around my ear and whispered, "I love you". I left their home and cried in the car as I drove away.

Chapter 5

INTERVIEWING ROSIE

The next interview presented is with a five year old girl named Rosie and her mother, Sara. Rosie, which is the pseudonym she selected for this presentation, was the very first participant I interviewed and at the time, had been in kindergarten for only a few months. Before meeting Rosie, Sara had explained that Rosie's quiet and reserved nature, especially around strangers, may make the interview process difficult or even impossible. So, I went into the first interview prepared for the possibility that Rosie may not engage in this process, but remained optimistic that we could create a sense of safety and security that would facilitate Rosie's participation.

Introduction

Rosie currently resides in a large Western Canadian city in a home with both of her parents and her brother, who is two years her senior. Although I had an opportunity to meet all four members of the family, I had minimal interaction with Rosie's brother and father, who did not participate in the study.

My first contact with the family after receiving their research referral was by phone to Rosie's mother, Sara. Sara openly answered my questions and appeared very interested in the research idea and was comfortable with the process for both Rosie and herself. Although Sara expressed enthusiasm and interest to participate, she also raised some concern about Rosie's ability to adequately engage in the process given her reserved nature. To best facilitate Rosie, Sara suggested that we meet in their home so that the environment is familiar to Rosie. Similarly, we allocated additional time prior to the child interview process for Rosie and me to become acquainted before separating from her mother. Finally, Sara selected a time for the interview when she knew her son and husband would not be at home so that she could be available for Rosie and I if needed.

In discussing the content of the child interviews with Sara, she expressed some concern about Rosie's "spirituality", saying "Rosie just started Sunday school recently. I don't think she has ever really thought about religion or these issues before. I hope she will be okay for your research". I was immediately reminded of a comment raised during my candidacy exam by an examiner who asked, "What if a participant doesn't give you what you are looking for?" I smiled as I recalled my response: I am not looking for anything beyond what the child is willing to share. I reassuringly relayed this sentiment to Sara and explained that spirituality in children may be experienced and expressed very differently from religion and further reminded her that my intention was not to assess how much Rosie knew about God or Sunday school, but rather about her own feelings and ideas. Despite this discussion, I suspected that Sara remained sceptical about Rosie's ability to participate in this study and did not want my time to be wasted. So, I thanked Sara for her concern and reiterated that it would be perfectly fine with me should it not to work out with Rosie but confirmed that I was happy to try. This seemed to ease Sara's concerns.

Upon arriving to their home for the first interview, I was greeted by Sara who warmly welcomed me in. She explained that Rosie was upstairs in the playroom and that she had been told that she would be meeting "someone she could play with" this evening. "Was that okay to say?" Sara asked. I smiled, and let her know that it was a wonderful way to introduce our time together. A few moments later, as Sara was hanging up my coat, I noticed a small figure standing still at the top of the stairs. I looked up and smiled at Rosie, who was standing with her head hanging slightly forward and her eyes poking through a veil of black bangs staring at me. I tilted my head like hers, looked up at her and smiled as I said hello. She returned the greeting and the smile then quickly turned around and headed back up the stairs.

Immigration and Cultural Background

Rosie and her brother were both born in Canada after Sara and her husband migrated from Hong Kong in 1987. Sara explained that she and her husband (then boyfriend) had both come to Canada as university students with the intention of obtaining their degrees and returning to Hong Kong. Both she and her husband pursued their undergraduate and graduate training programs in Canada but returned to Hong Kong frequently and still considered it "home". Nearing completion of their education in 1997 both had plans to return to Hong Kong, marry and start their lives. However, as Sara explained, the political situation in Hong Kong had changed and the couple made the decision to remain in Canada.

> *At that time, I don't know if you know the situation in Hong Kong, but in 1997 the Chinese government was going to take over Hong Kong, so there were a lot of people thinking of immigrating out and my father thought that was a good chance and we need to come out and be in the different part of the world.*

Given the political circumstances, Sara explained that her parents were very "open-minded" and supportive about life in Canada despite the cultural differences. Until their then, Sara explained that the couple had considered themselves as visiting students to Canada and did not feel a need to "fully adjust" to the Canadian culture. This perspective changed when their life in Canada became permanent.

> So what was it like to be in Canada at that time?
>
> *I'm lucky because Hong Kong was a British colony, so we have English education since kindergarten. But, I still admit, language is still a big problem because I think we have accents, right? (Laughs). And, not too many people understand you when you first come over. And also, like the local people, like you understand the basic thing, but when you talk about detail things and jokes and you don't have the cultural background, it's hard for you to understand.*
>
> Is that still an issue today?
>
> *It's getting better with time, but yes, the cultural aspect is still there. Also, the weather is still a challenge. The reason we come to (name of city) is because of the university and I think that the cost of living is lower here too.*
>
> Is that why you are staying here as well?
>
> *Yes, after our degree completions and then we both find a job here and so it's hard to go to a new place and settle down again, right? And now, we have kids and we don't think of leaving anymore, right?*

Sara further explained that their life in Canada since 1997 has felt much more settled than it did when they were university students, although both she and her husband miss Hong Kong and still consider it "home". Both of Sara's parents and older brother currently live in Hong Kong. Her husband's parents and siblings reside in Canada, which Sara said has been an excellent support for the family. However, because Sara's parents do not travel often, and her father is presently ill, the family still makes frequent (at least annual) trips back to Hong Kong to visit them.

Sara described Rosie and her brother as being "fairly settled in Canada" but explained that Rosie is "definitely less Canadian" than her brother. When asked what this meant, Sara explained that Rosie's current English language skills were not as developed as her brother's were. At home, Sara and her husband speak to each other and to their children in Cantonese. However, since their son began school, Sara explained that he tends to respond to his parents in English, rather than Cantonese. Sara felt that since Rosie had just begun school, this was not the case for her yet.

> *So, my son speaks English very well, actually he speaks Chinese with an English accent now, which I don't like (laughs), but Rosie is still pretty good because I hire a Chinese nanny to take care of her when she was one until three, so still she speaks good Chinese, as a matter of fact she speaks not as good English. But now she is in school, maybe this will change for her. Also, she talks to her brother in English sometimes.*

Maintaining Cantonese is a priority for Sara and her husband and represents a critical tie to the family's culture, history, tradition, and extended family. Sara expressed a fear of losing this tradition as a result of their choice to remain in Canada. She said that when she hears Rosie and her brother speak to each other in English, she often feels sad and encourages them to speak in Cantonese. I explored with Sara her thoughts of regret regarding their move to Canada, to which she shrugged her shoulders and said, "We are happy now, but at the time, we did not have much choice to stay."

We then discussed current stressors and adversities that Sara perceives Rosie to be experiencing in her life as a result of their migration to Canada.

> *So, in school she is always the shy one, the timid one that does not speak out.*
>
> Does she ever talk about those challenges with you?
>
> *No, she doesn't talk.*
>
> So when she comes home from school, when she feels comfortable, does she tell you about her day, or is that hard for her?
>
> *She doesn't complain about feeling shy or about speaking the language, but she does complain about French.*
>
> She's in French as well?
>
> *Yes, that kindergarten class she is in has a section that they learn basic verbal French and she had a hard enough time learning the English, so the French is very hard for her. That is*

when I first heard her complain about school. At first, she was just quite reluctant to go, so we knew there was something wrong here.

When was she reluctant to go?

This past September, short time after she started school...because last year, she went to the same school, but she was just in a play group and we found that this year she wasn't that happy when she came home. I think she doesn't believe that she can do as well as the other kids, especially because she doesn't speak English well either.

So what other stressors do you think Rosie might have in her life?

I think part of my fault also I think...culture wise in Western family is to invite friends over to the house...Rosie has been invited but she always beg me invite some friends here, but I still haven't wanted to invite friends over, so I think she's feeling "how come I am different". I have no special reason, but I just don't feel comfortable to have 4-5 kids playing in the house, or 4-5 parents who I don't know quite well in the house. I found it hard to just let other strangers in the house.

And so you feel Rosie is noticing that?

Oh yes, because she keeps asking me to have friends over. So I have said, okay maybe one, but not 3 or 4. So that's something that Rosie feels that she is a bit different.

So, what do you think the feeling she has is?

Maybe disappointment? But I don't think she has a good memory about it, she forgets because she doesn't talk about it that often. Once in a while she will remember and ask, but then will forget about it. But I let them play outside with the neighbourhood kids. But myself, I just cannot invite some friends and I do not know their backgrounds, I don't know, I just don't feel comfortable.

I can understand that.
So do you think that Rosie does not feel she has many friends?

Yes, she is not the kind of girl that has many, many friends, but she has one or two at school that she can talk to and always play with.

As Sara was talking more about Rosie's social circumstances, she stated that Rosie does not have many playmates or people whom she interacts with outside of school. At present, Rosie does not participate in any extra curricular activities other than attending church and Sunday school. Sara confirmed that Rosie spends much of her free time alone given that she only attends kindergarten for part of the day. Upon reflecting on this fact, Sara concluded that she would make an effort to invite one of Rosie's friends over to play after school one day.

Family's Spirituality, Religious Beliefs and Practices

Sara and her husband currently identify themselves and their families as practicing Catholics. Although Sara explained that her upbringing was more orthodox than her husband's was, religion is very important to both of them. Rosie and her family currently attend a "Chinese Catholic Parish" every Sunday, and as of a few months ago, Rosie began attending Sunday school with her brother. The family also observes all Catholic holidays and rituals surrounding major life events including birth, death, and marriage. The family also participates in a daily ritual of praying before meals, typically dinner, when they are all together. Sara's religious beliefs and values were also expressed during times of difficulty.

> *When I need help and I know that nothing else will help. I more ask for strength to help me go through a difficult time. Like at this point right now, my father is very sick in Hong Kong and I am so far away. So, what can I do, right? There is so much that I can talk to the hospital, and even when I go and visit, I have to come back. So, I pray for strength to take care of my kids here while my dad is sick there. And also I pray to give him strength to go through this difficult time.*

As Sara had mentioned attending a Chinese Catholic church, I wondered if it was important to her and her husband to be a part of a religious community that shared her ethnic origin specifically.

> So, is part of your intention to have your children in a Chinese church so that they are integrated with the other Chinese-Catholic immigrants in Canada?
>
> *Yes, of the same religion, same background and culture. Yes. I don't think that it is right for children to not grow up in Church atmosphere. I think it is because I don't trust the Western culture too much I am afraid that they will go in different path, not necessarily the good one. So, I want them to make friends with the church friends, so that they have the same spiritual practicing and morals and make them be a better human being.*
>
> Do you ever explain that to your children?
>
> *No, I have not spoken to them about this before, especially not Rosie, she is too young.*
>
> So, just out of curiosity, what would it be like for you to be in a Catholic service that wasn't specifically Chinese?
>
> *It is different because I don't know too many people there. So I go there and I know other people at my church. Part of it is the social aspect as well. So that the kids play together. They have a gym where the kids play together and sometimes we go after mass for lunch together. It is a community. The relationships are a very important part of it. I don't know if that's right but it is important for us to be social with the community.*

We then spent some time discussing Sara's religious beliefs and values with regards to how she was raising her children and the influence she believed religion has on Rosie and her brother.

> *I know that it works for me and that it is good for me, but kids are kids. You cannot really force them to understand such a big topic which I don't understand myself really. So, just be natural and teach them the right path and hopefully eventually they will get it. Like I try my best to teach them to have a good moral standard. And I think that is very important. I don't know, respect is very emphasized in Chinese culture so I would like them to keep that. And, for the spiritual thing, eventually they have to decide for themselves, even though I am enforcing some beliefs in them at this point. So I know that when they are 12 or 14 if they don't want to come anymore I will do my best to ask them to come, but I don't want to force them to come because then my relationship with them might be bad. I just hope that one day the eventually take it on for themselves.*
>
> So how would Rosie identify herself now? Do you think she understands the word Catholic? *Well, she knows that she goes to church and she knows Sunday school where they talk about Bible, Jesus, and all those simple things she knows, but I don't think she knows that there are many, many different kinds of Gods or religions.*
>
> And in her own language does she use the names Jesus or God during the week outside of Sunday school and church?
>
> *No, not that I have ever noticed.*
>
> So, if something challenging happens in your life, would you ever demonstrate language like that? For example, there are some families when something happens… They might say, let's pray to God.
>
> *Yes, like the 9/11 issue when Rosie's brother was watching TV and the news right in front of me, I stopped it and said, "let's pray to God and help those kids". So things like that, very big traumatic things. But, I don't really say God and Jesus in everything.*
>
> So, there is a direct connection between God and helping?
>
> *Yes, and between God and giving thanks, like for food and for our health. The other things that I do, but I would not call it religious because it is for all people, is tell the children to be honest, kind, understanding.*

It was clear when speaking to Sara that the practice of religious rituals and values were extremely important to her and how she raised her children. Equally important was the transmission of their Chinese culture and Cantonese language through their religious community. Despite there importance however, I was impressed by her awareness that this transference may be difficult to accomplish in Canada. I expressed my gratitude to Sara for her honesty in discussing these issues and asked how she recommended I proceed in meeting Rosie. Since I had not heard a sound from Rosie upstairs, I reassured Sara that if Rosie did not want to participate, we could either try again another day or not continue the process. Sara recommended that the three of us spend time together in the kitchen to assess Rosie's comfort level with me.

Meeting Rosie

Rosie came down the stairs gently holding her mother's hand taking slow, tip-toed steps. She looked at me several times and smiled as she approached the kitchen table and sat down. I thanked her for joining us and invited her and Sara to play with the art supplies, puppets, and other toys that I had brought with me. Rosie immediately looked up at her mom for approval, and with a nod from Sara began exploring my supplies. The three of us played together for about 15 minutes with very little verbal interaction. I followed Rosie's lead and spoke only when she asked a question. I felt it important not to dominate the conversation, especially since I was unsure at this stage of her English language skills. After this time, Sara excused herself and started working close by in the kitchen. As this did not seem to affect Rosie, I started taking a more active play role with her, which increased her comfort with me significantly. She began to talk and interact well enough in English to participate in the study.

I reviewed the process of the interview with Rosie and went over the assent form, which she was able to complete. I then asked Rosie to give me a tour of her house, which she happily did. She did not say much, but held my hand as she guided me through her house making eye contact and smiling often. I then asked her to take me to the place in her house "she feels most special". She proceeded to direct me towards her playroom, which she shares with her older brother. The play room was a fairly large open space in the upstairs of the home. It had a couch and coffee table with several play items placed throughout the room. Rosie and I sat down on the floor next to the coffee table and began our interview.

What a wonderful room, Rosie! Can you show me what you play with in here?

(No response, just smiles).

I see you have some dogs and kitty cats in here. They look pretty fun.

(Nods and picks up a gray bean-bag cat and places it next to us on the floor).

Okay Rosie, I am going to put down some paper, pens, crayons, and other little toys on the floor in case you want to play with any of these okay?

Are those markers?

Noticing that Rosie had not yet warmed up to the content of the discussion, we spent some more time colouring together with her toy cat, who I would soon meet formally, next to us. I wanted to know more about the cat, but was unsure of Rosie's level of engagement. So, I thought I would start by addressing some of the content from my earlier interview with Sara.

So Rosie, your mom was telling me that you go to Church? What is that like, because I have never been before?

I go to Sunday school
What is Sunday school?

It's like school. I learn how to do things like at school.

Do you ever talk about God in Sunday school?

No, I don't think so.

Do you ever talk about Jesus?

Yes.

Who is Jesus?

I am not sure.

Do you like going to Sunday school?

Yes, it's fun because I can play with the toys. They have a kitchen set that I like to play with. Look, I have a princess set.

Wow! Can you show me your princess set.
(Rosie brings out a small plastic case with a tiny plastic princess doll surrounded by several outfits made for the doll. The outfits have all the accessories such as shoes, purses, and jewellery. Rosie excitedly opens it up and gazes at me continuously with a large grin on her face. She opens the case and pulls out the doll.)

I noticed that Rosie quickly re-directed our conversation from Sunday school back to play. It was clear that at this time, she was not interested in discussing church, God, Jesus, or Sunday school, and she was letting me know. I was also aware that her enthusiasm and mood completely shifted when she started sharing about playing at Sunday school and about her princess set. She began talking more, smiling, and engaging me in conversation. I understood this to mean that play is meaningful for Rosie and needed to be explored further. So, I began to wonder about the role of play in her life and why the playroom was where she felt "most special". To understand this further, I started by directing my questions to Rosie's princess set, asking her to show me all of the different components and expressing sincere interest in the toy and in her play. This seemed to impress Rosie a great deal and connect us to one another. She drew herself closer to me and laid her hands on my knees as she showed me more detailed components of her princess set. After spending some time with this toy, I acknowledged the obvious importance of this room to Rosie, intending to communicate my awareness of its importance to her.

> You like being in this room don't you Rosie?
>
> *Yes, very much (smiles).*
>
> How does it make you feel to be in this room Rosie?
>
> *Very happy (smiles). But I have to share it with my brother.*
>
> So, do prefer it when he is not here with you.
>
> *Yes, I like it when he is not here.*
>
> So what do you like to do when you come in here without your brother?
>
> *I like playing with all of the toys. (Rosie dresses the little princess doll from her set).*
>
> So, you have chosen the pink dress for her to wear. That's a pretty dress. (Pause)
> So Rosie do you spend most of your time in this room?
>
> *Yes.*
>
> What is your favourite thing to do in this room?
>
> *I like to play with Rainbow.*
>
> Who is Rainbow?
>
> *(Rosie points to a large plastic riding horse that is supported by four springs).*

Figure 4: Rosie's Friend Rainbow

So this is Rainbow…Can you show me how you play with Rainbow?

(She walks over the horse, straddles it and climbs on. She then starts bouncing on it while she strokes the plastic mane with one hand and holding on to the handle with the other. Rosie is smiling and laughing as she bounces on its back).

Oh! I see! What else do you do with Rainbow?

She talks to me.

What kinds of things do you talk about?

I tell her to eat her food.

What kind of food does she like?

Cheese sandwiches.

Oh, those are yummy sandwiches. Rosie, how did you know her name was Rainbow?

She told me.

Oh, I see. Do you think it would be okay for me to talk to Rainbow?

Yes, but you have to shake her hand first.

Upon instruction from Rosie as to which "hand" to shake, I touched Rainbow's front leg and introduced myself to her. This gesture seemed to mean a great deal to Rosie as she jumped up and down, clapping and smiling. Rosie went on to explain that Rainbow often talks to other people, but that they cannot hear her, so Rosie will talk for her. She also explained where Rainbow came from.

> *Rainbow is a girl horse from China.*
>
> When did she come to Canada?
>
> *When I came to Canada.*
>
> And when did you come to Canada?
>
> *When I was just a baby.*
>
> Oh. And does Rainbow like it in Canada?
>
> *Yeah, but she misses her family. They stay in China.*
>
> Does she ever get to visit her family in China?
>
> *Yeah. She goes when its summer or sometimes on Saturday when there's no school. I go with her to visit China and we live in a Chinese house with a red roof. We have fun playing in the Chinese house.*
>
> How do you get to China?
>
> *We go at night time. Rainbow takes me on her back.*

Rosie was quite animated and talkative during this part of our conversation. She would pause at times to "listen" to Rainbow remind of her of details about their trips to China that Rosie had missed such as the type of foods they ate and the games Rainbow and Rosie play. I also found it interesting that Rosie identified her birth-place as China and said she arrived in Canada as a baby. I also wanted to explore this further, but Rosie then invited me to meet the other "friends" in the playroom that she talks to.

Talking to Friends

Rosie took my hand and excitedly guided me around the room introducing me to all of the animals and most of the dolls/figurines in the playroom. She did so with great pleasure and formality and made sure to tell me what kind of animal or figure each was, their name, and when she had "met" them. The ceremony of her introductions directed me to look all of her "friends" in the eyes, smile, and when possible shake their hand (or equivalent!). Rosie shared that each of her friends, like Rainbow, spoke only to her and that each of them shared their names with her upon their arrival to her playroom. All of the animals had in common a story of their arrival, a homeland away from

Canada, and family that had been left behind. It was remarkable that Rosie did not hesitate with any of the almost 30 introductions. And, when I forgot one of their names or made errors regarding the gender or "birth place" of any of her friends, I was impressed at how quick Rosie was to correct me.

Of particular importance to Rosie, was a gray male kitten from Africa, named "Gray-ee" who had accompanied us on our tour to meet her playroom friends. Rosie explained that Gray-ee was still a young kitten and missed his family in Africa very much, but did get to visit them whenever he wanted. Sometimes, Rosie said, he also came to China with her and Rainbow to "play in the Chinese house".

Figure 5: Rosie's Friend Gray-ee

After we finished the tour, I asked Rosie about the friends that are the most helpful to her.

> Who takes care of you the most?
>
> *Gray-ee. He tells the birds what to do. (Rosie reaches and grabs a bird from her play area). He asks them to sing, see? (She pushes a button and the bird starts chirping)*
>
> Wow! So how does that help you?
>
> *It makes me happy and sometimes makes me laugh (smiles).*
>
> How else does Gray-ee take care of you?
>
> *He stays with me when I am scared or sad. Sometimes he tells me funny things too.*
>
> Does he do that a lot?
>
> *Yes, he comes with me a lot. Sometimes he comes with me just because he's fun.*
>
> He sounds like a very good friend to have. Who else helps you in the playroom?
>
> *The Fairy Princess. She can fly because she has wings and a magic wand. Sometimes I can borrow it from her so that I can do magic things too.*

What kind of magic things?

Like fly away when I am sad or like that. Any magic I want.

Figure 6: Rosie's Fairy Princess

Does she ever use the magic wand to help you herself?

Yeah, she uses it all the time. She makes me laugh and feel better too. Just like Gray-ee. And sometimes, she uses the magic wand on Rainbow and Gray-ee.

What does the magic wand do for Rainbow and Gray-ee?

It makes them feel better too.

Oh. Well, she is very nice to help all of you like that. Do all the animals in your play room talk to you and help you, Rosie?

They all do. Everyday, they say, "I love you, I love you, I love you" (laughs).

Of course that helps you! Rosie, I was wondering, are all the animals in this room real or pretend?

Pretend.

So do they really talk to you or pretend talk to you?

Pretend talk to me.

How do you know the difference between pretend talking and really talking?

Cause my brain tells me that it is just pretend talking.

So the things that are pretend, how do you feel about them?

I love them because they love me.

Is the love you share with them real love or pretend love?

Real love.

So even though they are pretend, they still love you and help you.

Yes. I just pretend that they are real and that they are all my friends.

So when you pretend, where in your body do you feel them the most?

Everywhere! But also in my heart (touches her hand to her heart), and sometimes in my brain.

So what does your heart and brain feel like?

Like real love.

Even though Rosie understands her talking animals to be pretend, she was clear about how real her feelings were for them and theirs were for her. The real love she described seemed to evoke genuine feelings of love and reverence for each of her friends by the way she treated each one. She appeared to have established real friendships with them that helped her through times of difficulty, sadness and joy. Rosie's pretend toys seemed alive to her and had become a significant source of strength in her life. After we talked more about her love for her friends, I asked Rosie about other areas of her life that may be challenging for her.

Life Challenges

Rosie's mother had described social isolation as a concern affecting Rosie due to her shy personality and developing English skills. I noticed in my previous conversations with Rosie, how her fantasy trips to China with Rainbow to see other Chinese friends and interact in a familiar environment attests to the fact that she consciously seeks psychological connections with her culture and other people that are not available to her in her immediate context. My further conversations with Rosie suggested that another barrier to her having close friendships was the experience of bullying at school as described below.

Rosie talked about feeling most happy at home, especially when she was in her playroom. She also spoke very positively about her relationships with each of her family members, especially with her mom. When I asked about her school life, Rosie reported enjoying school and the work very much, including French, but did discuss some difficulties she has with her two "best" and only (according to Sara) friends. Pseudonyms are used for the two friends she describes.

Do you ever feel sad at school?

Sometimes my friend Chelsea makes me sad at school.

How does she make you sad?

Just today she made me sad. She hit me. She kicked me.

Are you still sad now?

Yes, a little bit.

How do you make yourself better when that happens?

I try not to cry. Because I am a big girl now and only babies cry.

Did someone tell you that?

My other friend Alyssa told me that. She told me to stop crying and being a baby all the time.

Rosie further stated that her friends at school are not always very nice to her and often tell her that she is not smart or "good enough" to be their friend. Rosie became extremely withdrawn during this discussion so I asked her what she needed right now to help her. Without saying anything to me, she reached over and carried Gray-ee's onto her lap. They had a short whispered conversation, after which she smiled and told me she felt better now. I asked her what happened to make her feel better and she said, "Gray-ee said that it's okay to cry when you're sad. I think she's right". "I do too", I said and gave Gray-ee a pat.

Rosie then spoke about several other children at school who also "punch, hit and kick" her. When I asked why they hurt her she said that it was because she "doesn't talk much" at school. Rosie also revealed that she had not yet spoken to her mom or teacher about these situations, but that she had talked to Rainbow and Gray-ee about it. We then spent some time de-briefing about why it was important to talk to an adult about these situations and what she can do to get help and to stop it from happening again. Rosie also agreed to talk to Sara about it after we were finished our time together in the playroom. I commended her for sharing this with me and asked if she wanted to talk about it more. After a little more discussion and noticeable change in her affect, I confirmed that it was okay to continue the interview.

Understanding God

I asked Rosie if she could talk to me a little more about Sunday school and going to the Chinese Catholic Parish. I was interested in how she understood the teachings and rituals that she regularly participated in.

Rosie, can you tell me more about Church and Sunday school?

They talk about how God helps people.

What do they say about how God helps people?

That God helps the bad people not to be bad anymore and to be good.

And who is God, Rosie?

He is kind of like a person. He is a boy and has short hair.

Could you draw me a picture of what God looks like?

It's too hard to draw.

Okay, can you tell me more about what he looks like?

He has brown hair and light skin. I saw a picture of him once.

Where did you see that picture?

In a book...I will show you if I can find it. It is in a bible book. Sometimes I hear him too.

Is the God in the book the same God you hear in your head?

Yes.

When do you hear God?

When I pray for him to come. I tell him thank you for helping me and for my mom and dad.

How did you know to do that?

I learned it from Sunday school.

Okay. So, do you ever talk to someone else the way you talk to God?

No, just God.

Do you ever talk to God about things like what happened today with Chelsea?

Yes. I always talk to him when something bad happens.

Do you ever talk to him when something good happens?

No, just bad things.

What other bad things have you talked to him about?

When someone scratched me.

Who scratched you?

My neighbour's dog.

What did you say to God then?

I asked him to talk to the dog.

Did he?

Yes, he told me he did.

Does God ever talk to Rainbow or Gray-ee?

Yes, he talks to both of them, but I didn't even hear it. I was downstairs when God talked to them.

How did you know that God talked to them?

Rainbow told me.

What did God say to them?

I don't know, but Rainbow said it was fun to talk to God.

So Rainbow liked that, hey? So why do you think God talked to Rainbow?

Because someone was scratching and hitting Rainbow.

So God came to help Rainbow with that. So God helps when someone is scratched or hit?

Yes. He is very nice. But sometimes he is very busy.

Oh, does that happen a lot?

It sometimes happens to me a lot at school.

So God is very busy when you need him at school.

Yes. But sometimes he talks to Rainbow and Gray-ee and tells them how to help me when I come home from school.

Oh, so how does that work for you?

Good. I like it when they talk to me about what God says.

Do you think God would talk to me?

Yes. He talks to all people.

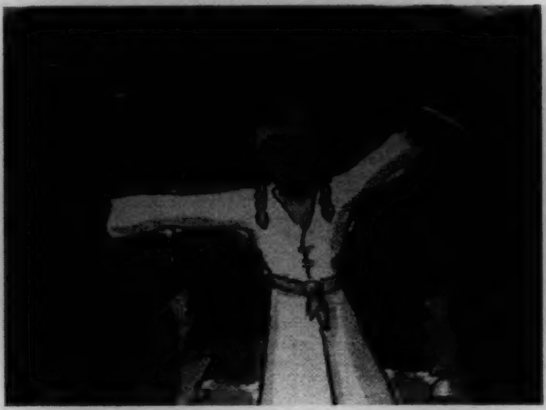
Is there anyone that he would not talk to?

No, he talks to everyone in the heads, even bad people.

So when he talks in our heads, where does he live?

In heaven the whole time. I am going to show you something in the Jesus book. Wait here. (Leaves the room to go and bring a children's bible book with coloured drawings). This used to be my brother's favourite book and now it is my favourite book. (Opens the book and flips through). This is a picture of God. See, he has brown hair and light skin.

Figure 7: Rosie's Picture of God



What else does God say to you in your head?

He says that he is going to help the people that are hurting me.

He says that he is going to help the people that are hurting you?

Yes.

So what does the voice sound like?

Like your voice right now, but in my head.

Is it a boy's voice?

Yes.

And how do you know that it is God's voice?

Because I feel it all over but mostly in my head.

When do you hear God's voice?

Mostly at night time when I am just going to sleep. He says, "Go to sleep and not to wake up when it is still night time".

Do you like that?

Yes, it makes me sleep good.

I was fascinated by how Rosie had integrated her world of talking toys with her understanding of God and prayer from her religious teachings. Particularly, how she used her friends to communicate with God while she was at school and did not receive immediate help for the challenges she experienced there. Instead of concluding that God was not responding, she viewed him as being "busy", but still taking care of her through Rainbow and Gray-ee. I was also struck by her view of God as helping those who are mean or bad, rather than supporting those who are good. This perspective was more empathic and other-centered than would be predicted given Rosie's age. Before concluding our discussion, I also further inquired about Jesus and rituals that Rosie may have experienced at Church, but she reported not knowing or remembering anything else.

Just as we were finishing, Sara entered the playroom to check on how we were doing. Rosie greeted her mom warmly, but quickly put away her "Jesus book" and became markedly less talkative. The three of us spent a few minutes talking together regarding Rosie's disclosure about being hurt at school and then decided to conclude our interview for the day. I turned to Rosie and thanked her for spending so much time with me and for sharing all of her feelings, views, and stories with me. I reminded her that I would be back soon to play and talk with her again. She gave me a hug and darted out of the room with Gray-ee in hand.

As Sara walked me out, she admitted to having stood outside the playroom door at times throughout our interview. She explained that she had never heard Rosie speak so much to anyone, nor was she aware that Rosie's English was "so advanced", and was curious to hear her. Sara also reported to be extremely surprised by her daughter's "imagination" and relationships with her toys. "She spends so much time up here. I had no idea what she was doing. Thank you for coming. Thank-you", she said.

Second Meeting

My next meeting with Sara and Rosie was scheduled three weeks after our first interview together, which was the time most convenient for the family. Sara asked that we arrange for an extended period of time for the interview, as was done for our first interview. She explained that Rosie had been anticipating my "visit" and "wanted to play for a long time" again. I happily agreed.

When I arrived at the home, both Sara and Rosie greeted me at the door. This time, Rosie took my coat, which was an obvious load for her little arms, and passed it to her mother to hang up. With a big smile and no words she took my hand and guided me up the staircase to the playroom. I motioned to Sara that I would be down in a few minutes to speak with her. Sara nodded and gleamed with joy that I assumed was a result of her daughter's enthusiasm.

Rosie asked me sit in the same place I had before…on the floor of the playroom near the couch. She gave me a big hug and thanked me for coming back to play with her. I returned the hug and the gratitude for her warm welcome and for her time with me as well. She was excited to take out and re-explore the toy and art supplies from my bag. So I asked her to set up what she wanted to use and took the opportunity to go and have a quick word with Sara. I brought Sara the transcripts from our first interview to review and a copy of the first interview I had with Rosie. I left Sara with the material and confirmed that we would have an opportunity to discuss the transcripts after my time with Rosie. As I turned to go upstairs again, I saw Rosie watching me from the top of the staircase. She gestured to "come up" with the wave of her hands and smiled as I hurried my pace back to the playroom.

Did you say hi to Gray-ee yet?

No, I didn't! Hi there Gray-ee! And how are you doing today?

He's good! Now sit here (pointing to the ground next to her). Let's say hi to Rainbow now.

Surprised and impressed by Rosie's confidence, I followed her directions which requested that I acknowledge and greet many of her other friends in the playroom. As a measure of reliability, I made purposeful errors regarding the details of some of her friends, to which I always received laughs and, "No silly! That's not it!" followed by the appropriate correction consistent with our previous interview. I was once more impressed by the respect and reverence she demonstrated for her toys, particularly Gray-ee and Rainbow. We then spent some time talking about Rosie's week at school while drawing.

While we were talking, I asked Rosie about school and the people there that were hurting her. She explained that her mom had talked to her teacher about the situation, which Rosie said made her feel "very happy". She also explained that her friend Chelsea tried to hit her again, but this time, Rosie stopped her and said, "No hitting, it's not nice" and proceeded to let her teacher know what happened. I commended Rosie on her bravery and for using her words. I then asked her where this idea came from.

From God

Oh, did God tell you to say that to Chelsea.

No, when Chelsea was going to hit me, I heard God in my head. He say, "No hitting, it's not nice". So I tell Chelsea and she stopped.

Did God tell you to talk to your teacher about what happened?

No, I just did that by myself.

That was a great idea too.

Yeah (laughs).

Rosie, is there ever a time when you would like to talk to God and he doesn't come? When you don't hear his voice?

> *No. He always comes, but sometimes he's busy so he talks to Rainbow and Gray-ee to help me. Remember, I told you?*
>
> Yes, I am sorry I forgot. And how does he know where you are?
>
> *Because he knows everything. He even knows my whole family and everyone in the whole world.*
>
> So do you remember last time I asked you if your play friends were real or pretend?
>
> *Yeah. They are pretend.*
>
> Okay. So, is God real or pretend?
>
> *God is real.*
>
> How do you know?
>
> *Because I feel it all over my body and in my head.*
>
> What does it feel like?
>
> *Like love too.*
>
> What do mean, too?
>
> *Real love, like with Rainbow and Gray-ee, remember?*
>
> Yes, I remember.

I then asked Rosie if she remembered any more about Jesus or going to church. She spoke about playing at church after Sunday school and more about the toys that were available there but did not speak of anything further. I also explored Rosie's knowledge of other terms including spirit, ghost, and angel. She did not display any interest in this conversation and told me she did not know anything about "those names". Finally, I asked Rosie if there was anything else that she would like to share with me.

> *I was a baby once.*
>
> Really? Do you remember being a baby?
>
> *Yes.*
>
> What was it like?
>
> *I just was with my mom all the time.*

Where were you before you were a baby?

In my mommy's tummy.

Do you remember being inside your mommy's tummy?

Yes, it was dark and very, very quiet.

Where were you before your mommy's tummy?

I was inside an egg.

What kind of egg?

Like the egg that you eat (made an oval shape with her index fingers and thumbs).

What was it like inside of the egg?

I was very, very tiny so it wasn't that squishy. I liked being in the egg.

What did you like about it?

I liked to crack it.

Show me how you cracked it.

I kicked it with my leg (stood up and kicked her right leg forward). That's how I came out.

Who put you inside the egg?

The doctor or God. I don't really remember.

What do you remember?

I remember being with God before I was in the egg.

How did it feel being with God?

I liked it.

What did you like about it?

He took care of me.

Did you do anything with him?

We didn't do very much.

What did you look like?

I had short hair and it was light black like yours

Were their other people there with you?

No, just me and God. And my mom.

Do you remember your mom being there too?

Yes.

Did she look different too?

No, she looked the same.

What did God look like?

Like the picture I showed you last time, but smaller.

Rosie went on to describe the conditions of the "egg" with detail and animation in her facial and body expression demonstrating how she was positioned inside and what it felt like. I asked Rosie where she was before she came into the egg and she said that she didn't remember and that maybe she could ask God to tell her. We then concluded the formal part of our interview and played with her toys. After some time, I reminded Rosie that I need to talk to her mom. Rosie walked me downstairs and sat close by the kitchen, in the family room, colouring while I talked with Sara.

Sara had reviewed both transcripts, confirmed the accuracy of hers and did not request any changes. She did state that her English skills were not as good as she wished they would be and apologized for any errors she may have made during our conversation. I reassured her that I had no difficulty understanding what she had said and that this was nothing to apologize for. We then discussed her response to Rosie's interview. As Sara had overheard parts of our discussion already, she was not surprised by any of the content but reiterated her amazement regarding Rosie's English skills and imagination. I then discussed with Sara her thoughts regarding Rosie's methods of helping herself feel better during times of difficulty. Sara reported feeling very happy that Rosie had found a way to help herself that included both God and her toys. "I think it is very good that she knows what can help her". We also discussed Rosie's desire to play and make social connections with others, as she was creating this environment for herself with her toys. In particular, I emphasized the developmental importance of Rosie's engagement with other children her age. Sara agreed that she would make an effort to invite other children from Rosie's class for play dates, especially given that this has been repeatedly request by Rosie.

After my second interview with Rosie, I was also curious about her prior knowledge regarding birth and the biology of an "egg" inside of the womb. Sara stated not ever mentioning this to Rosie before and confirmed that Rosie had not received any instruction about this at school or Sunday school. Just then, Rosie's father and brother came home and entered the conversation after brief introductions. The two also confirmed that neither had spoken to Rosie about this before. In fact, Rosie's brother reported that he had not heard of the "egg" concept before.

Saying Goodbye

After brief conversation with all members of the family, I gathered my supplies and said goodbye. Rosie ran to the front door with her mom and requested my coat from the closet. In the same way she had taken it from me earlier, she handed it back to me with a smile. Sara thanked me for spending time with Rosie and commented again on her amazement regarding Rosie's English skills. Rosie smiled embarrassingly and laughed. I knelt over to say goodbye to Rosie and received a warm and loving hug. I thanked her again for such a fun time and walked out to my car. When I looked back before driving off, Rosie and her mom were still smiling and waving good-bye.

Chapter 6

INTERVIEWING TANNER

The next interview narrative presented is that of a young boy named Tanner, who was the second child I had the opportunity to meet and learn from. Tanner was five years of age at the time of the interview and attended kindergarten in a local public school. Tanner participated in the study with his father, Norman, who opted to conduct the interviews in the university clinic private rooms for convenience purposes as Norman is currently a student at the university. It was a sincere pleasure meeting Tanner. He is a creative and thoughtful child who conducted this research endeavour with notable enthusiasm. As with the other children interviewed, he welcomed me into his inner-world with sincerity and a genuine desire to share and teach me about his spirituality.

Introduction

Tanner lives at home with both of his parents, Norman and Lisa, who were expecting their second child, a girl, around the time of our interviews. Given their family situation, I did not have an opportunity to meet or talk with Lisa directly. In speaking with Norman about the study, he declared a personal interest in the study's purpose and was enthusiastic to participate with Tanner. Specifically, Norman was curious if Tanner would have views or conceptions of spirituality given their current beliefs and practices in the home. Despite Norman and Lisa's individual upbringings, neither currently adheres to any specific form of religious doctrine or practice, although both do consider themselves "spiritual". As such, Norman was curious how and if Tanner may understand his own spirituality and such existential concerns regarding the world around him.

On the day of the first interview, Norman and Tanner came to the university clinic together. After a brief greeting, Tanner was asked to play in the supervised waiting area of the clinic while Norman and I proceeded to a private room to conduct the parent interview. Tanner was extremely cooperative and did not appear to find this temporary separation from his Dad difficult in any way. Regardless, Norman and I took periodic breaks throughout the interview to ensure that Tanner was managing well in the waiting area. Upon completion of the parental interview, Tanner was invited into the private room to colour and play with his father in order to increase his trust and comfort level with me.

Immigration and Cultural Background

Norman and Lisa's immigration histories and cultural backgrounds are diverse and complex. Both of Norman's parents are Jewish and immigrated to New York as adults. Norman, and his two siblings were all born in New York. His father is an Iranian Ashkenazi Jew whose first languages were Farsi and Aramaic, while Norman's mother is Eastern-European and migrated to New York following WWII. Norman and his family spent a short period of time in New York before moving to Hong Kong when Norman was 7 years of age because of an overseas employment opportunity his father had received. With this same employment company, Norman's family made three subsequent moves to Singapore, Cote d'Ivoire, and Japan all for approximately 3 years each before retuning to New York. Norman decided not to return to New York with his family and remained in Japan to complete his university education and to begin working.

Norman described enjoying his upbringing, particularly the exposure he received to diverse cultures and people; however, he also reported experiencing several cultural challenges including difficulties with language acquisition, racial discrimination, and social isolation. Norman explained that these challenges were buffered by his adaptable and easy going personality as well as the strength and connection of his immediate family with whom he always felt a sense of belonging. Culturally, his parents raised Norman and his siblings with the Jewish faith and traditions which he explained provided a consistency that he and his siblings appreciated. Regardless of his religious upbringing, Norman does not presently identify himself as Jewish or feel as though Judaism captures the complexity of his cultural experiences. Instead, Norman describes himself as a "practical humanitarian" and is predominantly influenced by humanistic ethics and science.

Lisa was born in Germany and immigrated to Canada with her family when she was seven years of age. Since living in Canada, Lisa and her family have remained immersed in the German-Catholic culture and still identify themselves culturally as German-Catholic. Lisa moved to Japan for work after completing her educational training, and met Norman in 1997. The couple married in 1998, and left Japan for New York after Tanner was born in 2001. After living in New York for two years, the couple moved to Canada in 2003 to be closer to Lisa's family.

The cultural transitions for the young family from Japan, to New York and then to Canada was challenging. Norman explained that Lisa was adjusting to her return to Canadian culture after 8 years, while he was adjusting to leaving his friends in Japan, family in New York, and adapting to the Canadian culture. Specifically, he finds Canadians to be less culturally diverse and globally aware but more pleasant and helpful; as well, he is adjusting to the much slower pace of living and the less competitive environment compared to New York and Japan. Norman explained that both he and Lisa are still adjusting, but have recently made the decision to live in Canada permanently. As a result, they are making more concerted efforts to establish a sense of community and a network of friends here. This recent decision has been extremely well received by Tanner, who has adjusted very well overall to their moves and cultural transitions.

According to Norman, Tanner initially had a very difficult time in Edmonton, particularly in coping with the separation from his paternal grandparents and relatives, with whom he spent a significant amount of time. As a result, Tanner had been primarily influenced by their culture, traditions and foods. In addition, Norman explained, that Tanner found it difficult to adjust to spending time with his maternal grandparents and to their German-Catholic culture, particularly the German language, religious celebrations, foods and customs. Over the past year or so, Norman explains that Tanner has adjusted extremely well to his new extended family and cultural influences but that he is still currently having difficulties understanding and identifying his own culture. According to Norman, since Tanner has started kindergarten and is exposed to children from various cultural traditions, he is asking more questions about his own family's beliefs and traditions. Tanner has expressed confusion regarding his paternal grandparents' celebration of Jewish festivities, his maternal grandparents' celebration of Catholic festivities, and his immediate family's non-religious affiliation. This was of particular concern for Tanner during the month of December, when he was learning about different cultural traditions and celebrations at school.

Family's Spirituality, Religious Beliefs, and Practices

Norman described his and Lisa's current beliefs and values with which they are raising Tanner as "spiritual" and "scientific". Norman further explains this perspective:

> *As I mentioned, the author Paul Bloom explains the tendency to understand how children understand the universe...how they always ask for explanations for things...like why do bad things happen and all those things. So in the beginning Lisa and I decided that we should just be very logical and very factual and try to explain as much as we can based on, I guess you might call it "secular", but I call it "informed by both the humanities and sciences". It's hard to explain in this short time, but I think my view of the world is both reverential to nature and also interested in understanding nature. So, I've tried and I think I have succeeded. I think Tanner looks at the world very analytically as much as he can...but that is not a negative thing. He has a critical curiosity and he likes to do experiments. So when he wants to know why things happen, I say, "try" and that's what he does a lot of the time.*
>
> So you encourage that perspective?
>
> *Yes, and being a scientist in training, and having to deal with these issues everyday, it gives me pleasure to see that he doesn't need any superstitious-like explanations for things to be confident and happy in the world. In fact he is completely free of what I would see as the negative legacy of our evolution, which was this period of darkness when we didn't understand the universe so we created superstitions and so I have tried to raise him free of those and so far I am very happy with how it has gone... We are very empirical. We talk about random things and luck, which are hard concepts to understand for kids. Like, sometimes things just happen because of the probability that an event can happen. There are certain things that you can predict and certain things that you cannot predict. If you wanted to, you could look for other reasons why things might happen, but mostly we understand them as random occurrences.*

We then discussed how Norman has responded to Tanner's questions regarding his cultural identity and the religious practices of others, particularly those of his extended family. Norman explained that he and Lisa have taught Tanner that it is important to be exposed to and accept various beliefs and practices of others and that this diversity is part of the human experience.

After concluding our interview, Norman and I met Tanner in the waiting area and invited him to join us in the clinic interview room. We spent some time together colouring and discussing the pictures that Tanner drew while he was in the waiting area. Tanner opened up very quickly and seemed at ease with the researcher almost immediately. We then reviewed the research purpose and the terms of confidentiality. Assent for participation was obtained from Tanner, who expressed excitement about seeing the playroom and starting the research interview. After a brief tour of the clinic, Norman was led into the viewing room adjacent to the playroom. The one-way mirror was shown to Tanner and his father's observation of our session was made known to him. After a few moments of playing with the video and sound equipment, Tanner and I proceeded into the playroom.

Tanner and the Playroom

Tanner looked around the playroom with great excitement and enthusiasm. He looked over each area of the playroom and the many toys and artifacts displayed. The playroom consisted of a carpeted area with a fort and a dollhouse, a small table and chair with paper, pens, and paints for artwork, a sandtray with many accessories and figurines displayed, and several puppets, stuffed animals and dolls. Tanner took his time orientating to the playroom while commenting on his findings along the way. I closely followed Tanner during his exploration and reminded him that he could use anything in the playroom to help him answer my questions during our interview and that there was no right or wrong answers in anything that we discussed. After several minutes passed, Tanner gravitated towards the dry sandtray. He asked what it was used for, and I said "whatever you want, as long as the sand stays inside the box". He immediately sat down on a chair near the tray and began manipulating the sand.

So what are you making?

I am making a planet. See, this is a planet. It's like called Haikin and it's this bigger than a tornado (extends his arms wide).

Wow, can you tell me more about this planet?

Well, the bad thing about it is that it has this tornado in the middle that keeps on going to the bottom forever and ever. But it blows up if it has, if you put a magic potion.

Wow, and then what happens when it blows up?

It blows up and gets better.

So, how do you get the magic potion?

You have to make it. Well nobody knows how to make it. Well one person knows, but that's the great wizard!

Oh, the great wizard! And where the does the great wizard live?

Right here, on the edge (points to one corner in the sandtray).

Would you like to look around the room to find the great wizard to put into the planet?

Tanner appeared excited by this invitation and quickly began to explore the room and the available figurines. His eyes lit up when he found the figure he wanted. He then turned to me with a big smile, raised the figure up into the air and said with a ceremonial tone, "This is the Great Wizard".

The Great Wizard

Tanner brought the wizard figurine back to the sandtray and placed him aside while he sculpted a small mound of sand in the corner of the tray. He then, carefully placed the wizard atop of the mound. Looking around at the empty tray he thoughtfully explained, "Sometimes the wizard puts out feathers in the planet". He then proceeded to find two feathers from the playroom and placed them upright behind the wizard, on the mound of sand. He also added a red ornament, which he explained was a magic crystal used by the great wizard. I was curious to learn more about the great wizard and Haikin and decided to explore this further with Tanner. My intention was to follow his lead and to ask questions that would expand my understanding of the world he was beginning to create in the sandtray.

Figure 8: The Great Wizard Fancon

Does the great wizard have a name?

Fancon

Oh, Fancon. How did Fancon come to be in Haikin?

He was born from a God.

He was born from a God. What kind of God?

Zeus.

And where did Zeus come from?

Earth. Haikin is the planet that Zeus gave birth to, he gave birth to it. And it's away from Earth.

So, is this planet in the sky right now?

No! (Laughs) It is from my imagination!

And where is your imagination in your body?

Here (points to head) and here (points to the middle of his chest, solar plexus)

What are those parts?

My heart and my brain.

Oh, and what part of your body does Fancon live in? Which part of your imagination does he come from?

Mmmm....Both.

Can you hear Fancon sometimes?

Yes.

What does he say to you?

I can't say. He said that I have to keep it a secret.

Sure. Does he talk to you a lot?

Yes, he does.

Is he talking to you right now?

No, not right now.

So can you call him whenever you want?

Whenever I need him, but mostly I don't need him because I can do things myself.

Oh. So when would you call Fancon then?

I actually need him for smartness. Mostly I need him for smartness at school. He is very smart!

How did he get that smart?

Well, usually Gods are really smart.

So is Fancon a God?

Yes. And he has the power to go to the underworld. It's where the devils live.

What are devils?

They are really mean things, really mean things. They have a sharp point at the end of their tail.

Are they in this world?

Yeah. They live in this part. (He points to an area in the sandtray that Tanner has hollowed out like a crater). This is the underworld.

Would you like to look for something around the playroom to put inside the underworld?

Yeah! (Tanner walks around the playroom to find "devils" to go inside the underworld. Tanner also finds a castle and places it in the middle edge of the sandtray). So Fancon lives here (points to original mound) and the king and queen of Haikin live in the castle. And you know what happens? Fancon goes in the underworld...and you know what's in the underworld, the devils...and he cuts a string and their spirit goes away and gets older and older and older until it dies. And God, only God can go in there without dying.

Okay. So Fancon cuts a string from the devils and their spirit gets older and older until it dies. But can you explain to me what a spirit is?

Like part of your body, like the thing that Indians believe in, like animals have spirits.

So do you have a spirit?

Fancon says our spirit is in our heart. Well actually, it's in your whole body. It's a part that makes you alive. Like in the underworld, they don't have any and that's why they are dead.

Oh, it's the part that makes you alive. So how did it get there?

You are born with it.

Oh. And where was it before you were born?

> *Your body makes it. Well in this place, you don't remember birth. Your spirits split. It gets older and older until one spirit dies and another spirit gets born.*
>
> So what happens to your body if your spirit dies?
>
> *Well, the old spirit goes away and a new spirit comes. And you're saying what happens to the old spirit? It goes into the underworld.*

Tanner went on to explain that upon death of the body, the old spirit travels to the underworld and a new spirit arrives in Haikin. He then further explained that old spirits that were "good" are taken out of the underworld by Fancon, who then releases them to Zeus. When asked what happens next, Tanner stated that Fancon had not told him about that yet, but he would ask. Tanner then introduced the concept of the soul and said that after the spirit "splits", the old soul dies and another one grows. When asked what the difference is between a soul and spirit, he said, "soul is the thing that's good or bad in a person and spirit is the thing that keeps you alive". He further explained that the soul is what grows with you over time depending on if you are "good or bad", but he reminded me that the bad souls go to the underworld and aren't taken out by Fancon.

During our conversation, there were so many thoughts racing through my mind and directions I wanted to pursue. Mostly, I was amazed that Tanner generated a discussion about the topic areas I wanted to pursue with him. I was sure that neither his parents nor I had mentioned the purpose of our discussion, yet the content was spontaneously generated by Tanner himself. Regarding the content of our interview thus far, I was interested in learning more about the spirit and soul as well as Fancon's role in the world. I was also very interested in knowing whether these were Tanner's beliefs about Earth and the "real" world, or whether this was only a part of his imagination and created planet in the sandtray. I decided to stay focused in his created world for now, but made a note to follow-up on the other questions later in the interview.

> When bad things happen in this world, what happens?
>
> *Fancon helps. He goes in (points to underworld) and helps all the spirits.*
>
> So what if something bad happens that is not in the underworld, or do all the bad things happen in the underworld.

All the bad things happen in the underworld.

So only good things happen up here, where the people live?

Yeah because Fancon is always there to protect them.

Oh, so if Fancon wasn't there, could bad things happen to them.

Yeah, exactly! But he gets mad when he can't keep everyone secure. He doesn't like anybody to die because you can't do anything without your spirit. Well, it's fun to have your spirit when you are alive.

Tanner then explained that Fancon's responsibility is to make sure that people have good souls so that their spirit can be taken back from the underworld. I was immediately struck in the parallel between Tanner's story and the ideas of heaven, hell, and salvation from Christian theology and wondered if he had heard these stories or ideas before. I was also interested in whether Tanner held these beliefs in his daily life and view of "reality". It is also interesting to note that up until this point in the interview Tanner had appeared cognizant of his father's presence behind the one-way mirror. He had now stopped glancing over at the window and seemed intensely involved in his sandtray world. This further encouraged me to pursue Tanner's practiced and lived beliefs.

Soul, Spirit, and Imagination

So Tanner, you said before that the planet Haikin is not real, but from your imagination, right?

Yeah.

So what do you think about Gods like Zeus and Fancon, spirits and souls…do these really exist or are they just in Haikin?

Really, all that's only in this world...really I don' really believe in Gods. Well...I believe in Gods in my dreams.

Oh, tell me about your dreams.

Well, that's a whole nother story.

Okay, are you ready to tell that story?

Well that will take like two hours!

Why don't you try a little bit?

Well, I can daydream and dream during the night time.

So, during your daytime dreams do you dream about Gods?

No.

So do you believe in Gods during your night time dreams?

Yes.

So what's the difference between your daytime and your night time dreams?

During my daytime dreams, I sleep with my eyes open.
In the night time dreams, what happens with the Gods?

I don't really remember much.

What do you remember?

Well, in my real world, when people die, they just go to the grave and stay there. But in my dreams, they don't.

Where do they go in your dreams?

I am not sure, but that's when I dream about the Gods.

What about spirits and souls. Do we have spirits and souls like you talked about in Haikin?

Yes. But your soul is just another way to say life. And we have imagination.

Tell me more about that.

Well, we have three things, our soul, spirit, and imagination. They all live in your heart.

Wow, our heart is pretty full! So how do you know your soul, spirit and imagination live there?

Because everybody knows that. Because you can feel them in there.

What does it feel like?

Your soul feels like pumping. You're soul pumps the blood.

So is your soul and your heart are the same thing?

Well the soul is actually another word for your heart and for life. Your soul is your heart. It actually is a new way of saying heart. You can have a black soul if you do bad things and a red soul if you do good things.

Okay, so then what is your spirit?

Actually, your spirit is the part that makes you alive, remember? And when you die, it splits.

Right. So that's the same as in Haikin?

Yeah.

So does everybody have a soul, spirit, and imagination?

Yes. They have to have all three.

What would happen if they didn't have all three?

Well…they just have to have it otherwise they just wouldn't be very smart.

Oh, okay, so they just wouldn't be very smart. What happens if you are not smart?

Well, you might do bad things and have a black soul.

Which of the three is the most important to have?

Imagination.

How come that is the most important part?

Well, if you didn't have imagination, you couldn't draw something, you couldn't do anything.

Wow, that's really cool. So you couldn't draw or do anything without an imagination?

Yeah.

So what do people do when they don't have an imagination, what happens?

Well, you need to have an imagination to even have friends.

Oh, so people without an imagination don't have friends?

Yeah. If you don't have imagination, you don't have friends and they would be very sad.

What about the people who have black souls? Can you tell me more about them?

Those are the people who don't have imaginations either.

So do you like the world of Haikin or the world that we live in?

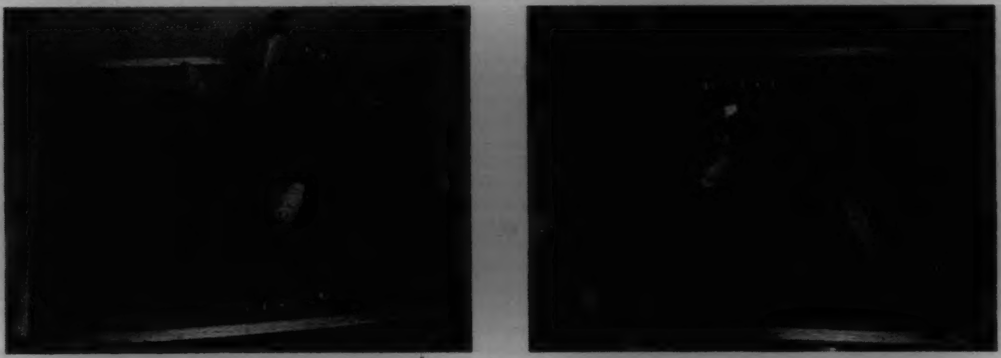
I like this world here (points to sandtray). Look, there's a dragon that lives in here too…the Great Dragon (places a large dragon into the sandtray).

At this point, Tanner re-directed our conversation back to the sandtray and the world of Haikin. I wondered if it was easier to explain his spirituality through the world he was creating in the sandtray, rather than through our dialogue. Even though Tanner differentiated his "reality" from his "imagination", there were clear similarities between his perspectives in both. Also, given that he had declared the importance of imagination in individuals, I could not ignore that Haikin and Fancon were a part of his imagination.

Haikin

Tanner spent the next several minutes adding additional figures and explaining the world of Haikin and its members in more detail. He explained where each of the characters he selected lived and how they fit into the world's structure. I focused my questions inquiring about his additions, the role each figure/ornament played and how they all interrelated.

Figure 9: Haikin



See this big Dragon? That's Fancon's pet dragon. He was born here. That's where all dragons come from. These dragons turn into kimono dragons.

Wow, that's pretty cool. So after they are born in Haikin, where do the kimono dragons go?

Well, they stay here because they help Fancon protect everything.

Oh, so are they the same kimono dragons that are on Earth?

Yeah, the same ones.

Can you tell me more about these feathers?

This one (pointing to the feather closest to Fancon) is Fancon's feather. It's a key to open the underworld. And, and an angel lives here too.

What are angels?

Figure 10: Angel

Angels are things that fly up.

And what do they do in this world?

They help people from death.

So angels don't like dying either?

No. Angels are something different from people though, they are not dead or alive. But, they don't like it when people die. Look these things (points to large ogre-like characters he has placed in the sandtray). They are protectors of the underworld. Well, they don't really protect, they take people inside the underworld. And the angels, they keep people from going down there.

So do they ever get into an argument?

Of course they get into arguments! But, the good guys (points at the angels) usually win. And the queen, she is a protector too (points to an Egyptian figure). She is Fancon's wife, Keena.

Figure 11: Queen

Keena used to be an angel. See, all the angels turn into queens if they are the top angel, the number one angel. And see him? (He points to a large ogre near he has placed near the base of the underworld). He is the king of the underworld. His name is Yaishon. He is alive, sort of, but he doesn't have an imagination.

So who is the most powerful in this whole world?

Fancon and Yaishon are both equal. I need to find some more things to protect the underworld. They are not really nice to hang out with.

How come?

You can't really trust them.

Who in this world can you trust?

Everybody except the underworld people.

How about on Earth?

Well, you want to trust people.

How do you know who you can trust?

I trust anyone that I think is good to try.

How do you know?

Well, in my dreams, Fancon tells me who I can trust.

So when you are dreaming at night, do you ever dream about this world here?

That's the only thing I dream about.

So have you been dreaming about it for a long time?

Yeah.

So when was the first time that you met Fancon?

A long time ago. Like when I was a baby.

Did you meet him before you were a baby?

Yeah. When I was in my mommy's tummy.

Where were you before you were in your mom's tummy?

I don't remember. Hey, do you have any superheroes here?

Once again, Tanner redirected my direct questions back to Haikin and started adding more objects to the sandtray. Again, I followed his lead and asked him questions about the additions he was making and pondered his preference for the indirect approach to our interview. Was it easier, more comfortable, less threatening, or was Haikin simply they way in which he conceptualized the world around him?

As our time was coming to an end, I commended Tanner on the hard work he had put into his creation and to our conversation. I ended by inquiring about the sacredness or privacy, if any, of Haikin.

> Is there anyone else that knows about this world of Haikin and about your dreams of Haikin?
>
> *No. No one else knows about it, just my dreams.*
>
> So do you want to tell anyone about this world?
>
> *No, I like to keep it private, keep it secret.*
>
> Okay. But do you remember that I am going to share what you talked about with other people?
>
> *Yeah.*
>
> So, when I tell them what you said, I won't use your name. Remember, you wanted me to use Tanner instead of your real name.
>
> *Yeah, that's still okay.*
> *Did you know that the older that you are, the smarter they get.*
>
> So does that mean if you are really young, you are not smart?
>
> *No, if they're young, you are also really smart, but if you are in the middle, like a teenager then you are not smart. See, I am young, so I am super smart.*
>
> Yes, you are. So Tanner, would you like to show your dad Haikin before we clean up?
>
> *I would like to put it all away...but first can we look at it again?*

We spent a little more time viewing the sandtray world and taking photographs before we began putting each object away. Tanner cleaned up with remarkable ceremony and carried each object with great reverence, be they the "protectors" or members of the "underworld". Following this procedure, I first ensured that Tanner wanted my help removing the items and then asked him to direct my help accordingly. He seemed to like this very much and asked me to only remove certain objects, or to stand by and watch him until the sandtray was empty. Upon completion of this task, Tanner and I retrieved his father and proceeded to leave the clinic. As Tanner sped ahead of us, Norman indicated that he was surprised as to the depth of Tanner's imagination and beliefs about the supernatural. Norman explained that Tanner had not been directly exposed to any religious teachings through either of his grandparents, but had been exposed to some religious symbols, rituals and customs. Norman did not express and concerns about Tanner's beliefs, rather seemed genuinely confused as to the source. I encouraged Norman to discuss the content of both interviews with Lisa and to generate any questions or concerns he or she may have for our next meeting. Since Norman had witnessed Tanner's interview first hand, I asked him not to discuss Tanner's content with him until completion of their participation in this study to ensure Tanner's perspective not be influenced by either of his parents.

Second Meeting

Our second interview was arranged at the university clinic exactly two weeks after our first meeting. Tanner ran through the clinic door ahead of his father and immediately greeted me with a big smile and expressed his excitement about using the playroom again. I reassured Tanner that we would be starting our second interview shortly and then spent a few moments with Norman and requested that he review the transcripts from our parental interview, as well as Tanner's playroom interview for accuracy. I reminded both of them that I would need more time with Norman after Tanner and I were finished in the playroom. Norman wanted to observe the second interview so he proceeded to the viewing room as Tanner and I entered the playroom. I invited Tanner to re-orient himself with the playroom and all of the available materials, but he was immediately drawn back to the sandtray.

Can we make Haikin again?

Sure. Actually, I wanted to learn more about that.

Okay, let's get all of the things we need. (Tanner looked around the playroom for the characters he needed to put back into the sand tray). This time, we need snakes and a fire lizard, lot's of violent things.

Okay. What makes something violent?

Well, they're mean. (Gathers more objects and places them in the sandtray). Now we need soldiers and knights and stuff. They are the good guys.

What makes them good guys?

They fight the mean things. Can you help me find the knights and soldiers?

Tanner why do we need more mean things this time?

Because there are lots of mean things in this world and we need to fight them and help Fancon. See this one, it's half horse and half eagle. And this one is half polar bear and half dragon. (Tanner points to each part of the characters and describes them. He then starts to play out the scene in the sandtray of a war between the soldiers and the knights and the "mean" animals).
You know what Farah? I had this really scary dream last night.

Oh really? Can you tell me a bit about your dream while you work on Haikin?
Sure. I was sleeping and my mom was trying to get out of the building so I woke up and went after her and then I didn't know where she went. Then I woke up for real. Well, when I know I am having a bad dream, I just say, "wake up, wake up" and then I wake up.

Oh. So does anyone else ever help wake you up or do you wake yourself up from bad dreams.

Well this one time I heard my mom calling, "wake up, wake up" but when I woke up, my mom wasn't there! It was pretty weird.

Does that happen any other times? Like do you hear voices but then there's nobody there.

Well, sometimes I hear someone say, "Tanner, Tanner" and then I go and ask my mom, "are you calling me?" and she says "No".

So how do you feel when that happens?

That it is pretty scary!

When does this happen to you?

Sometimes at night when I dream, and sometimes it happens when I am in my room. It sounds like my mom, but she is not there.

Does the voice ever say anything other than, "Tanner, Tanner"?

No. But you know what? I had the bad, scary dream, but then I got a dream catcher and now my dreams are better and it's not scary at night time.

What does the dream catcher do?

It catches all the bad dreams at night before it can come into my room.

Tanner, other than bad dreams, is there anything else that is difficult or challenging for you?

Well, remember I told you that sometimes I talk to Fancon to help me with smartness?

Yes.

Well, sometimes school is hard for me.

What is hard about school?

Sometimes homework and sometimes even making friends.

What is hard about making friends?

Well, it's not hard to make friends, but sometimes people are mean to me at school.

How are they mean to you?

They are mean to be by saying mean things and hurting my feelings.

What do you do when that happens?

Well, sometimes I tell my teacher or my parents.

Do you ever talk to Fancon about it?

Sometimes in my night time dreams, he helps me.

Just like in Haikin.

Yeah. Like in Haikin.

How does he help you?

He tells me how to feel better and sometimes we fight the bad guys.

In your night time dreams?

Yeah. Don't tell my dad, but I don't really want to play soccer anymore.

Oh really, how come?

I don't really like it very much.

How come you can't tell your dad?

Because he'll get mad at me and scream.

And then what would happen?

He'd take me to soccer anyway and I don't really like it.

What do you think Fancon would say about that?

He would probably say that I should talk to my dad.

Do you think you might do that?

Maybe I will ask Fancon what to say because I don't want my dad to get mad.

That sounds like a really good idea.

Yeah.

Tanner, when I was talking to your Dad last time, he told me that sometimes you miss your grandparents and family in New York. Can you tell me about that?

I sometimes miss them, but mostly I can talk to them on the phone and then I don't miss them.

Are there any other challenges in your life right now Tanner?

No.

I noticed that the issues raised by Norman to be affecting Tanner did not seem to be his primary concerns at this time. Tanner identified challenges in peer relationships as his current life difficulty, which is a common occurrence among immigrant and non-immigrant children his age. We continued talking until Tanner declared that he had completed his sandtray world. The resemblance to his previous sandtray was remarkable. We reviewed much of the same content as was previously discussed, with much of the same responses. This time however, Tanner focused more on the battle between Fancon, "leader of the protectors" and Yaishin, "leader of the underworld". Tanner seemed to enjoy re-playing battle sequences where Fancon and the protectors came out as the winners. Tanner's consistency with the mythology of Haikin, each of the characters and their relationships demonstrated its importance and validity to Tanner. The process of his re-creation was similarly notable. Each character was sought out intentionally and treated with apparent reverence when placed in the sandtray. Several times during his construction, Tanner circled the sandtray from different perspectives and making minor adjustments to the placement of objects as though to ensure its accuracy.

Figure 12: Re-Creation of Haikin

After reviewing additional interview questions and taking more pictures of his re-created sandtray, Tanner and I reviewed his transcript from our previous session to ensure I had recorded and understood the material accurately. Tanner and I then proceeded to disassemble Haikin with the same ceremonial process as in the first session. I then reminded Tanner that I would need to spend some time with his father, before ending our time together. Tanner asked to remain in the playroom to draw and colour while I spoke to Norman.

Norman and I proceeded to a private clinic room to discuss the contents of his interview transcript and his and Lisa's impressions of Tanner's interview. After Norman approved the accuracy of the parent interview transcript, we proceeded to discuss Tanner's interview content. Norman explained that he and Lisa had both discussed Tanner's interview and expressed similar surprise at his use of imagination and "superstitious thinking" in daily life given both parents' scientific and logical worldview. Norman explained that this was not bothersome to either of them, just surprising. Norman also expressed curiosity as to the source of Tanner's views and wondered if in fact, these were self-generated. Norman also mentioned that he nor Lisa had not ever heard Tanner mention Haikin or any of the characters before, but would be curious to explore this world with Tanner, if we would be willing. In particular, Norman was interested in discussing Tanner's feelings about soccer and wondered if maybe using Fancon might facilitate his discussion with Tanner. Norman's genuine curiosity and interest in his son's view, particularly in the world of Haikin, was obvious and commendable given the distinction between his beliefs and Tanner's.

Saying Goodbye

Upon completion of our time together, I walked both Norman and Tanner to the clinic exit and once again thanked them for their time and honesty. I knelt down and especially thanked Tanner for teaching me about the world of Haikin and sharing all of his ideas. He responded with a hug and a smile and turned to leave the clinic.

Chapter 7

INTERVIEWING EMILEE

The interview story presented next is that of a five-year-old girl, named Emilee who is currently attending kindergarten at a public school in Western Canada. Emilee was the sixth and last co-researcher for this study and participated with her father, Jonas. Although I had originally contacted Emilee very early in the research process, we could not meet until a much later date as her mother, Marie, was expecting the birth of their third child, Charlotte. By the time of our first meeting, Emilee's new sister was only six weeks old and Marie, who was very busy taking care of Charlotte, could not participate in the research process. Despite the excitement of their new family member and busy schedule, Emilee and Jonas were extremely co-operative and warmly welcomed me into their home for the interview process, as this was expressed to be the most convenient option for the family. Also living at home was Emilee's younger sister, Sara who is three years old and her maternal grandmother who was visiting the family from Cameroon to help with Charlotte's recent arrival.

Introduction

My initial contact with the family was on the phone with Jonas, who expressed an immediate interest in the purpose of the study, specifically in learning about Emilee's concept of spirituality. Jonas also expressed a genuine desire to aid in university-based research, particularly projects conducted by students as he was a university graduate himself. I was delighted by Jonas' support and enthusiasm for the project as well as his willingness to participate at a later date despite his family's circumstance. We arranged a tentative date to reconnect and confirm our meeting time for the initial interviews.

On the day of the first interview, I was welcomed into the family home by Emilee and Sara, who opened the front door when I arrived. They were both dressed in traditional African print house-dresses and looked extremely pleased to greet me. Emilee politely left in search of her father while Sara stood by the door staring at my knapsack and box of toys and supplies with sheepish curiosity. I smiled and said hello to Sara, who quickly darted off behind Emilee. The two girls returned shortly with their father, Jonas. He introduced the girls who responded with giggles and then led me into the family dining room, where we set up to conduct our parental interview. He instructed the girls to play in the basement while we talked. After reviewing the purpose and process of the research project as well as the consent forms, we began our interview.

Immigration and Cultural background

Jonas and Marie are both originally from Cameroon and completed their university education in France and Belgium, respectively. Throughout their educational training, both Jonas and Marie returned frequently to their homes in Cameroon, where both of their parents and much of their extended families still reside. Jonas is a software engineer and Marie is a family physician, but is unable to practice in Canada. The two met in Belgium in 1990, married in 1999 in Cameroon, and immediately returned to France to work. Both Emilee and Sara were born in France. Jonas explains their migration history.

> So, why did you and Marie both decide to leave Cameroon for your education?
>
> *Oh, because the education system, well at that time, the education system in Cameroon was not good. And because we are colonized by France, it made sense for many young people from Cameroon to go to France to further their studies and then come back to Cameroon to work.*
>
> So was it your hope to return to Cameroon after your studies were complete?
>
> *Yes, I was living with the hope that six years later I would go back to Cameroon and work. But, unfortunately, a couple of years passed when I was in France and the situation in Cameroon for work and for life was not good. So, even my parents were telling me to stay there and work.*
>
> So, you decided to stay in France.
>
> *No, I did not decide to stay, the situation was just not good enough for us to return to Cameroon yet. So, we decided to stay and work and keeping the hope that things would change in Cameroon so that we can go back.*
>
> I see, so your goal was to eventually return to Cameroon when the situation improved.
>
> *Yes, but we had to keep on living in the mean time. And, I was gaining work experience anyways, which would help me when I returned to Cameroon anyways.*
>
> So how did you eventually come to Canada?

> *Well, after working with my company in France for five years...it is a world-wide company. So, they would offer opportunities to move, like to go to Brazil, Africa, U.S., Canada.*

Jonas explained that he and Marie decided that it was critical for their future success both abroad and in Cameroon that they and their children become fluent in English. So, Jonas requested a move to any English speaking country, which turned out to be Canada. The family moved here just over three years ago, but still maintain their goal of eventually returning to Cameroon.

> *To be self-sufficient in this world, I believe that you need to speak English. Especially for my children. I want them to be open to the world, and they would need English to do this.*
>
> So, how did you feel about Canada as your destination?
>
> *Well, I didn't know what to expect. A colleague of mine was placed in Canada and he called me and said, "do you still want to move to an English speaking country? Well, I am in Canada and there are many opportunities here". I did not know what to expect. He used to work with me in France and now he is the manager here and I am guessing he wanted more French people here! (laughs). So, since I really wanted to move, I thought, why not?*
>
> Was Marie in support of the move?
>
> *Yes, at the beginning. But, her main concern was that she would be able to work as a physician, because she was already working in France. And so I asked my work if she would be able to work in Canada and they said with a work permit, no problem. And, I did not check more than that. Unfortunately, that was not the case. That's the black side, because everything else worked out well. Anyways, we were pretty excited to come and happy with our decision. In France, everyone is so busy, so busy, but here the life is smoother.*
>
> Can you tell me more about your adjustment to Canada?
>
> *Well, when we moved for example...well, we are lucky because my company really helps those who have to move. There is a lot of relocation support. Like, to find a house, to take the health care, to open the bank account, all of that. But, as I mentioned, the biggest disappointment is that Marie is not able to work. The other adjustment was with the children. Sara was only four months old when we came and Emilee was two years. It was difficult for them to learn English and it is still difficult now.*
>
> Did any of you speak English before you arrived?
>
> *Yes. Marie and I both had the basics, but we were not yet fluent...so yes, another challenge for all of us was communication. But, it really helped that the manager of my center here was French. Well really it did not help us become fluent, but it helped for our adjustment. The children did not speak any English at all. Well, Sara was too little, but Emilee did not.*
>
> Can you tell me more about Emilee's challenges?
>
> *Well, what I believe is that when you learn two languages at one time, you are not as good in either as you would have been if you were only learning one language. But, I think she is*

> *doing quite well overall. The first month of being here though, she was not saying anything at all in English at her daycare. We were very worried actually, why isn't she saying anything?! (laughs).*
>
> So right now in her life, what kind of little challenges do you think she may have in her life?
>
> *Well, language is still a challenge for her. At home, we speak only French and I want the children to speak only French so that they can maintain their native language. In the beginning this was hard for the girls, but now they are better. It is still a challenge because now when Emilee is with her sister playing, they sometimes start speaking English and we have to remind them, "No, please speak French with your sister at home", and then they will. Like I said before, I think that it is difficult for her to keep up with both her English and French skills equally.*

I asked Jonas about other areas of Emilee's life in which she may be experiencing challenges such as making friends, school work, and family relationships. He explained that overall Emilee seems to be adjusting well to Canadian culture, but that she is also very aware of their Cameroon heritage. Specifically, Jonas explained that the family remains traditional in their cooking, dressing, and culture, which was evidenced in their home that day. Although he stated not having much of a Cameroon community in Canada, he explained that their family is very connected to their extended families, who they visit frequently in Cameroon and in France. Jonas did not report any difficulties with Emilee's cultural identity formation and speculated that she would identify herself as being both from Canada and Cameroon, but not in combination with one another. "She probably sees her life as having two parts, one at home and one at school. Her home life is from Cameroon and her school life is from Canada. But", he clarified, "she definitely knows she's French".

Family's Spirituality, Religious Beliefs, and Practices

Jonas explained that because Cameroon is a French colony, most people were raised within a Christian framework. Specifically, Marie was raised as a Catholic and he as a Protestant.

> *I would say that Marie's family was more religious than mine. In fact, we got married in a Church because it was important to them.*
>
> So, would either you or Marie identify yourself with those faiths?
>
> *Well, Marie might. She is not very orthodox or a fanatic about religion, but she does believe in God and occasionally she will go to Church on important holidays.*
>
> Do you and the girls go with her?

The girls do, but I don't think they would know what it is.

How about yourself? Would you consider yourself religious?

No, not at all. Although I was raised Protestant, I did not really ever believe in God or in the idea of religion.

When did that happen for you?

Oh, early. When I was about 18 years old I gave it up completely.

Do you follow any other particular framework?

Well, like I explained on the phone, I believe in the freedom of choice. I don't think religion is bad, but I just don't believe that there is someone or something watching over all of us, waiting for us to make our choices – good or bad. But, for some people, maybe they need to think that there is someone making sure they are making 'good' choices in life. I just don't need that in order to make good decisions in life. That is my spiritual framework, I guess. I don't need to be accountable to someone else in order to make good decisions.

So how do you feel about Marie's religious beliefs?

Well, like I said, I believe in the freedom of choice. So, if she chooses to believe in God that is fine with me. As long as she is not fanatical or very orthodox, it is fine with me. What religion teaches people is basically to be a good person and to do good things, which there is nothing wrong with at all.

So what have the girls been raised with?

Well, I don't really talk to them about God or religion, but we do talk about general principals of tolerance and acceptance of others. I really wanted my children to grow up in a country with cultural diversity. Marie believes this too, so we really have very similar values with the children.

Does Marie talk to the girls about God or religion?

She has. She teaches them informally about God and religion. You know, that there is a God or a greater being out there, watching over you...that sort of thing.

And how do the children respond?

Well, it's funny, I think they get it a little bit. The other day...Emilee received this book from her aunt last summer when we went to France. It is a children's bible, in French. Anyways, sometimes I hear Marie reading this to Emilee. Anyways, Emilee asked me, "Where does God live?" And I said, "Why do you ask"? She said that in her book, it said that God lived in the sky. So I said, "Okay", but I though it was funny that she asked.

Are you okay with her asking those questions and having an understanding of God?

> *I am okay with her having some belief in God. Like I said before, I am more concerned that she knows about other peoples beliefs and is tolerant to those.*

Jonas clarified that it is most important to him that Emilee and Sara treat others respectfully, live honestly, take responsibility for their actions, and are aware of other cultures and religious beliefs. He further explained that formal religion may help in teaching his children these values, but that the rituals and ceremonies of religion are not necessary to do so. He defined himself and his family spirituality as based on humanistic and moral values. He explained that he and Marie translated these values predominantly through their own actions and modeling, as well as through family discussions, discipline and overall parental guidance. Finally, when discussing these topics with Emilee, he cautioned that she would only know the French words for religious language, such as *Dieu* for God and *Eglise* for Church. As far as he could recall, the family had not used the English name, "God" with Emilee before.

Meeting Emilee

Emilee played quietly with Sara in the family playroom in the basement while I was conducting the parental interview with Jonas. When it was time for my interview with Emilee, Jonas called for her to come upstairs and join us in the dining room. Emilee responded immediately and quickly joined her father at the table while looking over at me with cautioned curiosity. I smiled and explained to Emilee why I had come to their home and what the interview process would entail. Taking note of the apprehension in her body language, I took out my play kit and asked if there was anything she would like to play with before we started our time together. Looking at her father to confirm approval, she removed the paper and colouring materials from my box and smiled. I encouraged her to begin drawing, while I did the same. We compared pictures and exchanged ideas while we coloured together for about ten minutes. During this time, Jonas was casually completing tasks around the house, while making periodic visits to check on Emilee. After this orientation, Emilee appeared much more at ease with me and seemed ready to initiate our research conversation so I reviewed the consent form with her, which she very happily completed and agreed to.

I then asked Emilee to take me to a room in the house where she felt the most special. She smiled and led me upstairs to her bedroom, with Sara following close behind. I let Sara know that I would need "alone time" with her sister, but she followed us nonetheless. By the time we reached Emilee's room, Emilee turned to Sara and lovingly encouraged her to go back downstairs to Jonas declaring, "Farah and I have to be alone now". Sara reluctantly, but respectfully turned and left. Upon entering Emilee's bedroom, she sat quietly in the center of the floor, beckoned me to join her, and with a smile welcomed the initiation of the interview.

So, this is your most special place in the house?

Yes (Emilee nods and giggles).

Why is it so special for you?

Because it is my room, except sometimes my sister sleeps here too.

What do you like about your room?

I like the bed and the window and the toys in here.

What is your favourite part?

The dolls. (She points to a few baby dolls lined up on her bed and on the floor of her room).

We spent some time exploring the parts of the room that Emilee liked the most including her many toys and trinkets. Emilee seemed much more confident and appeared to enjoy our time together, so I decided to explore some of her ideas about God, Church, and spirituality directly.

God, Wishing Stars, and Emilee's Adversity

So Emilee, downstairs when we went through that paper with all of the questions, I told you that we would be talking about lots of different things and playing together. Well, one of the things I wanted to talk to you about is Dieu. Do you know that name?

Yes, I know about God.

Can you tell me about God?

I have never met him before, but I know that he lives in the sky and he's sort of like a really old man. He lives way up high in the sky and in the clouds (points outside her window) and he stays there all of the time.

Can you show me where?

No (laughs), it is way too high for us to see from here. You know, really, really, high in the sky! (She points at the sky through the window with one hand, and then gestures a great distance with both of her arms). He sometimes has to do things here on Earth so he has super long and stretchy arms that can reach anywhere in the world he wants to (Emilee stands up and makes a large circle with her arms stretched out in front of her).

What does he need to do on Earth?

He helps people (laughs). Don't you know that God helps people?

No, tell me more…who does he help?

He helps anyone who wishes on a wishing star. Whatever they wish for, he makes it come true.

What is a wishing star?

You know...those stars that have a long tail that go woosh in the sky? The ones that go super fast and the go from here to here (she makes a line in the air with her hand stretching across the space in front of her body).

So, have you ever seen one?

No, but I know they are there in the sky.

Oh. So what would you wish for if you saw a wishing star?

I would wish for all of the bad people to go away.

How come?

Because bad people do bad things and make people sad. Bad people do mean things, like lie and steal and hurt people.

Do you know any bad people?

No, not really. But there are lots of bad people who the police have to catch out there.

How do you know that?

I just know that.

Oh. So what would happen if all of the bad people were gone?

Everything would be happy all over.

What would be different for you?

I would be able to sleep at night. Right now, at night, I stay awake and awake and awake at night.

How come?

Because I keep thinking about the bad people and witches.

Who are witches?

Witches are really, really, bad and they can come into your room at night and hurt you if they want to. If I had a wishing star, I would wish for the witches and the bad people to go away so that I won't be scared at night.

That sounds like a great idea. Emilee, can anyone use a wishing star to make a wish?

Only the good people.

So can the bad people use a wishing star?

Only for good wishes.

What is a good wish?

I told you, a wish that makes the bad people go away! Like if a bad person wants to be a good person then God would help them and make their wish into magic to come true.

So how does God know when someone makes a wish on a wishing star?

He hears all of the good wishes and then does magic to make them come true and then he just makes them real. He can't hear any of the bad wishes, he just hears the good ones. His ears only work for the good ones because he has special ears.

What would happen if you made your wish and it didn't come true?

I would make it again and again and again until it came true. But you need a wishing star each time. You have to look very carefully in the sky for a wishing star because they are very fast. I look from my window every time and I just can't find one, that's why I can't sleep at night.

I was fascinated by Emilee's understanding of God and her use of rare wishing stars for her prayers, or requests of God. Her persistence and faith in this process was also remarkable given that she has not yet used or seen a "wishing star", nor has her desire to sleep through the night been alleviated. I imagined Emilee faithfully spending many nights looking for a wishing star in order to make the bad people go away so that she is able to sleep better. I wanted to know more about this belief system and how God was specifically involved.

Emilee, have you ever seen God?

No, but some of my friends at school have (she names three friends).

What did they say about God?

That he is super old, like 99 or something. He's so old he may die soon!

Oh, so what happens when God dies?

Well, he wishes for another God to be born to take his place.

How does he wish for another God?

He makes a wish on a wishing star.

Hmm. So who is listening to God when he makes a wish on a wishing star?

Well, there is a Big God that lives even higher and higher in the sky than that God that takes care of everyone in the whole sky. The Big God listens to the Little God in the sky and finds a new God when the Little God gets really old and dies.

So does the Big God ever need to be replaced? Does he ever die?

No, he is always there.

Okay. So Emilee, what else does the Big God do?

He helps the Little God with everything here on Earth. He is just like the Little God, but bigger. Maybe the little God and the big God are one family or something.

So, when you make a wish on a wishing star, who hears it?

Both of them, because really they are the same anyways. They are both God.

Okay. So, when you make your wish, do you say your words out loud?

No, I just whisper them in my head. I think it in my head and he hears me. But sometimes I talk out loud too.

So do you talk to God even when you don't have a wish to make?

Yes. I mostly talk to God at night time, mostly when I can't sleep. Hey, you know what, I'll show you what God looks like...I have this book that show what God looks like (Emilee gets up and leaves the room to look for a book, but doesn't find it). I can't find it. I don't know where it is anymore, but it has a picture of God in the sky.

Tell me more about when you can't sleep.

Well, I really don't like sleeping by myself at night time. I like it when someone else sleeps in my bed with me because then I don't get scared of the bad people and witches at night time.

Who usually sleeps with you?

My mom and sometimes my grandmother. I always ask them to sleep with me, but they don't like to do that very much. But my mom promised that she would sleep with me soon...maybe today she will sleep with me.

Why does that help?

Because I like hearing their breathing...then I know that they can protect me and make sure that I am safe.

How do you make sure that you are safe when you are not with your mom or your grandmother?

I talk to my babies.

Who are your babies?

They are my dolls, they are pretend babies. They love God very much. At night, they say (she says in a sing-song voice), "I love God, I love God, I love God..."

Emilee's Babies

Emilee removes her "favourite" baby from her bed and brings it down to the floor of her bedroom where we are sitting. She explains why her babies love God.

Figure 13: Emilee's Baby

[redacted]

You see, God made them...but then, they played a trick on God.

What do you mean?

Well, they loved God so much that they wanted to stay with him in the sky forever and ever so when it was time to come to Earth, they didn't become real babies so they could stay with God.

So, there is part of them that came to Earth and part of them that stayed with God?

Well, they are here as pretend babies, but they are really with God.

Oh. So, how do you know all of this?

Because the babies told me.

How do they tell you?

With their voices.

Do you hear their voices like you are hearing mine?

Yes.

Can anyone else hear their voices?

No…they only talk to very, very special people with glasses (she points to the glasses resting on her face). No one else, not even my sister, Sara, can hear them.

Wow, you must be very special then. Can tell me more about your babies?

Well, they talk to me at night time and sometimes they are allowed to sleep with me in the bed, but mostly they have to sleep in the basement.

How come?

Because sometimes the bed is crowded with my sister and then there is no room for them sometimes. Yeah, they don't like the basement very much, especially at night time because it's scary down there at night time.

Can you hear them when they are in the basement?

Yes, they are saying, "I love God, I love God" like that.

So, if you don't have the babies, your mom or your grandmother, are you able to sleep at night?

I don't know. I just stay awake and awake sometimes.

Does anyone in your family know that this happens to you?

I don't know.

I am sorry that this is so hard for you Emilee. Maybe we can talk to your dad about it later. What do you think might help you?

If the babies were allowed to sleep with me upstairs instead of the basement.

Okay. Can you tell me a little more about the real babies that stayed with God?

He holds them. He carries them in the sky with him.

Do they like it there?

YES! They love it there with him, that's why they tricked him.

As Emilee and I were talking I was concerned about her difficulties sleeping and wanted to make sure that I addressed this with her father after our interview. I was also interested in Emilee's understanding of her dolls as having being both real and pretend and tricking God so that they could remain with him in the sky and wondered how she felt about real-life babies, in particular, her new sister, Charlotte. I asked Emilee about her thoughts on where her new sister came from.

Emilee, where did Charlotte come from?

From my mommy and daddy...but she was in my mommy's tummy for a long time.

And where was she before your mommy's tummy?

She was in the sky with God before mommy's tummy with the other real babies are, he was holding her. But, he has to be careful because if he drops her, she would have a long way down to fall back to Earth. But he is very careful, he has never dropped a baby before.

So how did you know about where Charlotte was before your mommy's tummy?

I don't know, I just know.

Okay, what about you…where were you before your mommy's tummy?

I was with God in the sky too.

Do you remember that?

No, but I know I was there because that's how I know all about God and babies.

I then asked Emilee if she was able to draw me pictures about any of this, and she reminded me that she didn't remember meeting God or being in the sky. However, she suggested that we go downstairs to the playroom and talk to her other "babies" to find out what they knew. When we went to the playroom to meet the other babies that Emilee often speaks with, Sara followed behind. Emilee then explained that the babies wouldn't "talk" in front of Sara, so maybe we could just play instead. I agreed and the three of us played in the playroom together for a short time. I then excused myself to discuss my concerns about Emilee's sleeping with Jonas, who was unaware of her difficulties and agreed to the idea of having one of the dolls accompany Emilee at bedtime. I returned to the playroom to say good-bye to the girls and shared the news with Emilee who was extremely happy. She gave me a big hug and said good-bye.

Second Meeting

Our next meeting was scheduled in the family home two weeks following our initial interview. Emilee greeted me at the door and welcomed me into her home with much more confidence and enthusiasm than she had the first day. Sara came running towards the door as well and greeted me with a big smile. The two girls escorted me and my belongings upstairs to Emilee's bedroom for our second interview. Emilee also informed me that her dad, Jonas, had not yet arrived home from work, but would come up as soon as he did. To prevent this interruption, I briefly spoke to Maria and left the transcripts with her for Jonas to review when he came home. Due to Sara's enthusiasm, the three of us played together in Emilee's room briefly after which time I reminded her that Emilee and I would need our personal time again, but that we would play with her again afterwards. Sara agreed and happily coloured in another room until Emilee and I had completed our second interview.

After a brief period of time talking about Emilee's last couple of weeks and recent events at school and home that had occurred I initiated our second interview conversation.

So Emilee, do you remember what we spoke about when I was here last time?

Yes, I told you about wishing stars and God and my babies.

That's right. You also talked to me about night time, do you remember?

Yeah because I stay awake and awake and awake.

So, is that still happening?

Yes because the baby won't talk to me at night time because Sara sleeps here too. I wish that I had someone else to sleep with me, like my mom or my grandmother.

Why is hard for you to fall asleep Emilee?

Because I keep thinking about the bad people and I can't find a wishing star. I never see one because the stars are already hiding underneath the clouds.

So how does that make you feel?

I feel sad. But sometimes I can hear my baby talk at night time when Sara is asleep.

Oh. And does that help you?

Yeah. I just like hearing them (giggles).

Where is God when you are listening to the baby talking?

Well, he is in the sky, but you can't see him because he hides.

How come he hides?

I don't know, he just hides. Maybe that's what he needs to do, just hide. Well actually, he is invisible. He is everywhere, even in this house.

He is?

Yeah, he lives even in your mouth, but you can't see him.

How do you know all this about God?

I just know that.

How does he get everywhere?

I don't know, maybe he just decides where he wants to be and he gets there. Like maybe he wants to be in your mouth, so he goes in your mouth. You know what? If I could go anywhere I wanted to go, I would go visit my other brother and sister. They live in Paris.

Your other brother and sister?

I call them that, but they aren't really my brother and sister, they are my cousins.

Why would you like to visit them?

Because when we visit them, I get to sleep with them at night time and not be scared. Once, there were so many of us sharing a bed and I didn't even fall!

Wow! It is really important for you to sleep with people at night time, hey Emilee?

Yeah. I would like lots and lots of people!

Is it hard to be by yourself at night and go to sleep?

Yes. That's the hardest.

Remember last time you thought that it would help you at night time to have one of your babies with you. Can you think of anything else that might help?

Well, if I can't have big people sleeping with me, maybe I can have Sara sleep with me and maybe I can ask the baby to talk to Sara too. Maybe that will help.

I think that is a great idea. What would you like the baby to say to you at night time?

Maybe the baby can tell me about living in the sky with God. I am sure it is so much fun to live up, up, up in the sky! That's a good idea, maybe that will work and Sara can listen too.

Emilee and I spent a little more time talking and working through her difficulties falling asleep at night. I encouraged her to talk more about it with her parents so that they are aware of the situation. I was amazed at Emilee's persistence in creating and utilizing her own unique strategies to help herself through this difficulty and in her faith in the process. Although her difficulties had not yet alleviated, and she expressed sadness about it, she also expressed optimism in her ability to find an eventual resolution.

Before inviting Sara to join us in Emilee's bedroom, I thanked her for her time and reviewed her previous interview transcript. As with the other interviews, I asked additional questions and made purposeful errors to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the document and Emilee's responses. We then invited Sara to colour and play with Emilee while I spent time with Jonas.

Jonas had arrived home shortly after I started my interview with Emilee and had a chance to review the parent and child transcripts from my previous visit. Jonas did not have any changes or additions to his transcript, but expressed genuine interest in Emilee's interview. He was not aware of any of her expressed beliefs and was surprised at her use of God throughout her conceptualizations. He did report awareness of Emilee's "conversations" with her dolls, but had not heard her explanations for their existence or the value they played in her life. Jonas appeared very impressed by his daughter's creativity and her attempts at resolving her personal concerns herself.

We also spent time discussing Emilee's expressed difficulties sleeping, fears of "bad people and witches", and desire to sleep with other adults in the room. As both the researcher and a child psychologist, I recognized that Emilee's sleep challenges appeared to be related to separation from her relatives through the family's migration process. Emilee noted sleeping well when in the presence of her mother and grandmother, as well as during visits to her cousins' home in France whom she identified as her "brother" and "sister". I shared this with Jonas, who also explained that Emilee has only recently been provided with her own bedroom, and that she may also still be adjusting to sleeping alone. Nevertheless, we discussed the impact of poor sleep on a child of Emilee's age and the importance of seeking a resolution. Jonas suggested that perhaps they develop a more consistent 'good night' ritual that involved both parents and used Emilee's dolls as part of the process, as well as other symbols such as photographs of the missed family members. I then provided Jonas with contact information of individuals that may be available to help the family if this problem persists and encouraged him to discuss it with their family pediatrician as well.

Saying Goodbye

Both Jonas and Emilee expressed gratitude for my visits and for the time spent with the family. I was taken aback by their kindness and felt extremely grateful to both of them for their time, honesty, and openness in discussing issues of such a personal nature and for welcoming me into their home with such warmth and hospitality. Sara and Emilee walked me to the door and waited patiently for me to put on my coat and gather my belongings before embracing my legs. The two girls laughed and giggled as they waved good-bye.

Chapter 8

INTERVIEWING JAYIN

The interview I have selected to present next is that of a young boy named Jayin, who is four and a half years old and currently attends pre-school and pre-kindergarten classes. Jayin was the third child I had the privilege of learning from in this study. He is an active and charismatic boy who expressed himself with great confidence and enthusiasm. The time I spent with him went very quickly and he was a sincere joy to be around.

Introduction

Jayin currently lives at home with his mother, Serena and an older brother, who is seven. The family recently purchased a new home and were still settling in at the time of the interview. The move came as a result of Jayin's parents' divorce. Although they formalized their divorce almost four years ago, for cultural reasons, the unit stayed very connected until recently. Serena explained that the couple had been encouraged to live together in the same house for the "sake of the children" by both sets of parents. After a very difficult time with this arrangement, Serena moved in with her parents for five months until moving into their current home a month ago. According to Serena, the moves have been difficult for both boys, but for the eldest in particular. The boys currently spend every second weekend with their father and one evening every week. Serena and Jayin's father live very close to one another so the children have access to their father regularly if needed. "We are still working things out" she explained, "It has been a very good, but challenging change for all of us".

Upon contacting Serena over the phone for participation in this study, her warm and open nature was immediately evident. She expressed interest in the topic area being studied and in her and Jayin participating especially given their current family situation and recent move. Specifically, Serena was curious how Jayin was coping with all of their recent family changes, particularly the cultural and religious views being expressed about the divorce by members of the family and their cultural community. Serena requested that the interviews be conducted at her new home, as she felt this would be the most comfortable location for Jayin.

On the day of the initial interviews, I was welcomed to the home by Serena. Jayin was upstairs in his room when I arrived and did not come down until after Serena and I had completed our interview. She explained that Jayin was always initially shy to meet new people, but that his outgoing personality would soon emerge. After reviewing the purpose and process of the research project as well as the consent forms, we began our interview.

Immigration and Cultural background

Serena immigrated to Canada with her parents and two younger sisters from India when Serena was ten years old in search of "better opportunities and a better life". Serena explained that her father's brother had moved to Canada a few years earlier and had recommended the transition for their family. Serena's family originally arrived in Saskatoon, where they stayed with her uncle for a short period of time before moving to Western Canada. Serena has vivid memories of their arrival and expressed some of the cultural transitions she and Jayin are still encountering.

> *I was amazed at how different it was from India. The people, the way of life, the smell, the look, everything...complete culture shock, you know? And we were young, but we were still very Indian and it was all so different for us. It was different as we grew up with this culture and it is still very different now. We basically lived with our family, our dad's brother, we lived with them for a little while and then we moved out on our own. And, I went to school here and yeah, it was very difficult for my parents as well. The culture is so much freer here than India.*
>
> How was it difficult for your parents?
>
> *Well, raising three girls in a free culture was very hard for them. Basically, the main difference between me and my sisters was that I was the oldest, so I became the guinea pig and my parents were a lot more strict with me than with them.*
>
> How so?
>
> *In terms of freedom mostly. So, my sisters, the next one down is three years younger than me so by the time they came around to being 18, I had been through it all already, I got the brunt of it! Like with clothes, friends, and especially boys. It was really hard for them, I guess. Not easy at all. Although I was a very obedient child, they were always scared we would go down the wrong path. And, being the eldest, it was up to me to set the example for my sisters.*
>
> What about now? What are some of the cultural challenges you are facing today?
>
> *The biggest challenges have been with the divorce and with raising my children. It is that my parents still want to intervene. They think that this is the way things should be done. They have different views of marriage and of raising children than me. I think that they understand*

that it is different now from when we were growing up, but still, they are very hard on me. Especially because divorce it typically not an option in my culture.

So what is the situation for you now within your community, have you felt accepted?

No, people still talk...they will talk regardless of what I am doing.

So how do you yourself feel about the divorce?

Well I am relieved overall, but it does make it hard for me with my community. Like if I want to meet somebody else, everyone will have something to say. Everyone says, 'oh yeah, we want you to move on and make a life for yourself', but really that means they don't want you near their sons. So, of course, to a certain extent, my life is harder for me now. And my family, I don't think they have fully accepted that I won't go back to my ex-husband. They just can't accept it.

Serena further explained that she has been able to find a small support network of other women her age within her Indian community that has made her transition easier to manage. As well, Serena explains that her sisters have been a wonderful source of strength for her, particularly within her immediate and extended families.

With regards to Jayin, Serena wonders if he completely understands the meaning of divorce. Given that she and his father were divorced, but remained in the same home, she speculates that this may have been confusing for Jayin. Since moving homes, Serena explains that Jayin has appeared very excited about having two rooms (one in each parent's home) and has adjusted to seeing his parents separately. However, she did explain that Jayin has been having some difficulties sleeping and worries about his father being alone. Culturally, Serena feels that Jayin is currently struggling with understanding the colour of his skin, "why he is brown and others are white", for example and why his family speaks English, Hindi and Punjabi at home. "Although he is fluent in all three languages, lately, he only wants me to speak to him in English". I am not sure if he is embarrassed, or doesn't like using the traditional languages anymore.

Family's Spirituality, Religious Beliefs, and Practices

Serena described her cultural identity and upbringing as intricately tied to her spiritual and religious identity. Specifically, she described herself as a "Hindu-Punjabi" who practices both Hinduism and Sikhism. As she further explained, her father is Sikh and her mother is Hindu, so although she was raised with both traditions, rituals, and practices, her family predominantly practice Sikhism. However, Jayin's father and his family practice Hinduism, so Jayin and his brother have now also been raised with both belief systems. When spending time with his mother and maternal family, Jayin and his brother are exposed to the Sikh traditions. Specifically, they attend the Gurudwara every weekend, even during the times they are at their father's home, during religious holidays, festivities, and cultural events. Jayin is exposed to Hindu traditions occasionally throughout the year with their father, but more regularly during the summer months when Jayin's paternal grandparents visit from England. Culturally, the family also celebrates Indian holidays like Diwali which are traditionally Hindu celebrations. Because of his frequent religious attendance and exposure Jayin understands and practices all of the rites and rituals with familiarity and ease; although, according to Serena he has little understanding of the meaning.

Serena explained that she does not consider herself a very religious person even though her religion is a very important part of her cultural identity, sense of community, and established family values. She explained that since her divorce and the difficulties she faced personally and from the community, she has "lost her faith somewhat". Specifically, she stated that she still "believes in God" but explained that many of the rites and rituals have lost meaning, particularly her attendance to the Gurudwara: "As far as I am concerned, if I believe in God, I don't need to be sitting in a temple to show my beliefs".

With her children, Serena declared that it is still very important to her extended family that the children be raised with the beliefs and practices of Sikhism and Hinduism. However, from her perspective, it is not as critical for the children to learn the rituals as it is to have a belief in God and good moral values. Nevertheless, Serena has set up a place of worship in the home that the children regularly use for prayers, particularly before leaving for school. She also teaches her children certain rituals such as bowing their head when they shower in the morning. Finally, Serena explained that their religious beliefs also come into daily conversation and use during times of difficulty or hardship.

Before introducing me to Jayin, Serena suggested that during my interview with him I use the name Gurunanak or Bagwan to refer to God, as Jayin would not likely have heard the word "God" before. She then brought Jayin downstairs and introduced him to me.

Meeting Jayin

Jayin, Serena and I sat together in the living room and talked about their new house, school, and other general topics of conversation. As Serena had suggested earlier, it took Jayin very little time to initiate conversation with me and his animated and colourful personality soon emerged. I then introduced the purpose and process of the research interview and reviewed the assent form with Jayin. He happily completed the form and expressed interest in starting our "play time" together. With excitement, he then asked his mother if he could show me a new *Spiderman* knapsack he received for school. After a detailed look at his new bag, he excitedly led me through other show-and-tell presentations around the house. This quickly turned into a tour of the family's new home, which Jayin gave with great pride and pleasure, reminding me often that this was their "new house".

Jayin spoke a great deal about his brother revealing obvious admiration and love. As he was not home at the time of our interview, Jayin promised an introduction if I was still at their home when his brother returned. After the tour, as with the other research participants, I asked Jayin to take me to the place in his house he felt the "most special". With a big smile, he took my hand and guided me to his bedroom. After Jayin provided a similar orientation and tour of his room, we sat down on the floor and began our interview.

> So Jayin, downstairs when you were showing me around your house, you were telling me a little about what you do at the Gurudwara? Can you tell me more about what that is? What is the Gurudwara?
>
> *It's a place you go to play with your friends and do jiya?*
>
> What's jiya?
>
> *You have to put your head down, give money and then pray to God.*

Spending Time with God

I was surprised by Jayin's use of the English name "God" based on his mother's interview and wondered if and where he might have heard it before. Because he used the term in reference to his Sikh practices, I also wanted to clarify his use and understanding of the name, God as well as his individual spiritual practices further.

So who is God?

God lives in the sky with Santa.

He lives in the sky with Santa?

Yeah!

How do you know!

Because I met them before.

You met both God and Santa before? Tell me about when you met them.

Well, God takes care of everyone, so I just know him and I met Santa at Wal-Mart where there is a special chair there and he sat there and I got to get a candy cane from him. So that's when I met Santa and this is how I met God. I got to meet God and he gave me this (Jayin pulled out a little toy figurine of "Baloo" the Bear from Disney's "Jungle Book"). See, he gave me this special toy.

Wow (looking closer at Baloo). He's really cool, I like Baloo. So when did you meet God?

At IGA…I saw him there by myself.

What do you mean?

No one else could see him there, just me. He looks like this (Jayin stands up and excitedly gestures the size and profile of God by extending his body from toes to arms demonstrating a very tall figure). He has a beard all around him (Jayin gestures around his own face), and his clothes, he has long clothes on and he also can see you.

Do you think you could draw a picture of God for me?

I don't really remember how to draw him. It's too hard to draw him. But I'll show you (he demonstrates the size and length of God again), He has a long beard and a big head and long clothes too.

You are really stretching your arms and body, how tall is he?

See the ceiling up there (points to the ceiling of his bedroom). He is up to there and his feet is are down on the floor, see?(Jayin stretches his arms up high and then bends low to touch the floor).

Yes, I do see. You're right, that is very tall. So Jayin, how did you know it was God?

Cause I already knew he was God. When I met him he just looked like God. I also saw him at Wal-Mart once. God and Santa were having dinner with each other and not even everyone could see that. I know because I saw them laughing and they were talking together. My Mama (Hindi word for "Uncle") was with me.

Could your Mama see God and Santa too?

He could see Santa, but not God. I could see him, you know how?

No.

Cause I have lasers in my eyes.

You have lasers in your eyes! Wow, that's cool!

Yeah, but no one can see my lasers because they are secret.

Oh. So, can only you see God?

Yeah, only me.

Can you see God whenever you want? Can you see them right now?

Yeah, if I wanted to...except I can't see him now unless I look into the sky.

And then what do you do?

You just pray and he comes to you. When nobody is awake, he quietly comes here to see you.

What do you mean "here"?

I mean here in my bedroom.

Oh. So does this happen at night time, then?

Yeah.

So how did God find you at your new house?

I showed him a map once. Then he found my house and now he knows how to come here.

Wow, Jayin, this all sounds so cool. Can you tell me more, about how all of this works?

The pace of our conversation to this point was established by Jayin's excitement and enthusiasm for the content. He was standing up, using elaborate hand gestures, and speaking very quickly with exaggerated intonation for most of our discussion while moving about his room with his eyes remaining fixated on mine. I returned his gaze and attempted to match his pace and enthusiasm in order to demonstrate my acceptance and genuine interest in what he was saying. This involved following him around the room, standing up for parts of our conversation and using animated facial expressions and an expressive tone of voice. He appeared to appreciate my interest and enthusiasm as he continued his level of energy and excitement about sharing his experiences.

Sometimes, I sit down and pray on my bed and he comes.

Every time?

Yeah, every time. But sometimes, at night time, I get up in the morning and I get off of my bed and go onto the carpet and I go sou-sou (urinates) in the bathroom and then I go back to bed and then he is there in my bedroom!

So where is he when he comes into your bedroom?

He comes and sits on a chair that is downstairs. Santa sits on a white chair that is downstairs and God sits on another chair sometimes that is downstairs too. But when he comes to my bedroom, God goes wherever he wants to.

Do God and Santa ever come here at the same time?

Yeah, God sits on this chair (points to a chair in his bedroom) and Santa sits on the other white one downstairs.

So what do they do when they come?

They fall fast asleep, but they wake up before everyone wakes up so no one sees them.

So do you know when they are here?

Yeah, but they come as a secret (whispers).

Do they come as a secret just for you?

Yeah (whispers).

Can you tell me more about when they come to your room?

Well, I don't call them to come. I just pray and then they come by themselves.

Can you show me how you pray?

(Jayin sits on the floor with his legs folded underneath his bottom and puts his hands together bending forward touching his forehead to the floor). See, I go like this and they just come!

Did you learn to pray like that?

I don't remember. I just know that's how to pray.

Do you say anything when you are praying?

No, they don't like it when you say anything, then they won't come. They like you to be quiet.

So they don't like you to say anything while you are praying.

Yeah. But, I can talk to them when they come.

What do you say when you talk to them?

We talk about their ideas and what they want me to do.

Tell me more about that.

Well, they tell me that he can go into the sky by magic when he wants to.

Who?

God.

He does it with magic?

Yeah. He doesn't even have to fly, he doesn't need anything to fly into the sky, and he just needs his magic remote control, that's it! Well, God and Santa both have the remote control. So if Santa really wants to take his sled, he could use the remote control. And if God wants to go anywhere, he just takes the remote control and goes (Jayin pretends to press an imaginary remote control and makes a noise to indicate that he is pushing the buttons) and then he goes wherever he wants.

Wow. That sounds like a really fast way to travel.

Yeah, because the sky is very high away.

Yes, I guess it is. Jayin, have you ever felt God or Santa?

Yeah. I have felt God before. He feels comfy. He's made out of paper.

Paper like this (I point to a regular sheet of paper)?
No. It's made out of...(he looks around the room and picks up a clear plastic sheet from his closet)...like this kind of paper. Like see-through kind of paper. He has eyes on top of his head.

Where? Where you have eyes?

No, way taller than that. Way up on his head!

Wow. And what colour are his eyes?

They are blue, green, and yellow and brown. All different colours...whatever he wants. So, remember I was telling you that he comes into my room whenever I pray? See this hole over here? (Jayin points to a small key hole on a lock on the handle of his bedroom window). Well, he opens the window and he comes in. And when I wake up to go sou-sou (urinate) and he's here. And sometimes when I wake up, he's still here, and so then I go back to bed.

Does he ever sleep with you in your bed?

No, because I don't really like him sleeping with me because he might fall off because my bed is really small. See, (walks over to the bed), when I sleep here (demonstrates) and God is here, he would be too big for my bed. See, God is too tall for my bed, see?

So, he stays in the bedroom while you are sleeping?

Yeah, he sleeps here the whole time. When my mom sleeps, he sleeps and when my when my mom wake ups, he has to go.

So how come he is not here when your mom is awake?

Because she doesn't see him. Because he's invisible. But sometimes he's here when she wakes up to go to the bathroom, but then he hides in the closet.

Why does he need to hide if he is invisible?

Just in case.

So is it important that your mom not see him?

Yeah. If she wants to see him then she has to call him herself.

How would she call him?

She would have to pray, remember like I showed you?

Yes, I do remember.

As Jayin was talking, I was impressed by his ability to express himself and his experiences with such detail, enthusiasm, and persistence. It felt as though he wanted me to listen to his experiences, to honour them as a witness. Not as though he wanted to convince me, but rather that he wanted to share. As we were having the above conversation, I also noted that Jayin became less active, without compromising his enthusiasm and intensity. In some parts, he even whispered, and looked at his closed bedroom door, almost ensuring his privacy of the content.

Life Challenges and God's Helpers

I was interested in when Jayin would make the decision to pray and have God or Santa come into his room or home, or if this was a regular, daily practice for him.

When do you pray so that God and Santa will come, Jayin?

Well, I mostly need God at night time. That's the best time to come.

How come?

I get scared sometimes.

What happens?

I have bad dreams.

What happens in your bad dreams?

There are big spiders that come and I am scared of them.

So what does God do?

He comes to visit me, he sometimes puts music on and he dances, he's so funny! (Jayin starts laughing and spinning around the room with a big smile on his face).

He is?

Yeah! He's so funny! He dances and dances and sometimes he's very silly. And Santa sometimes dances, but usually he just laughs at God and does this (demonstrates Santa waving his hand as though saying, "you're silly"). And then he laughs at God. They are really funny!

Do they do anything else to make you feel better?

Well (lowers the volume of his voice), sometimes God has to get angry and punch things for me.

What does he have to punch?

Whatever I am scared of. Like the spiders from my dreams. And you know what else? Well, sometimes he calls the fairy, and then the friendly fairy comes, that are magic from the sky, she comes into the window (points at the key hole again) and God tells her to get the spiders. And then the fairy gets the spiders and gets them in their net. And then Spiderman comes and takes them away.

Wow, there are others that help God and Santa? Can you tell me more about them?

Well, fairies come from everywhere in the whole world, but actually the fairy that helps God lives with him in the sky. Well actually, there are friends that all live together in the sky.

Who are the friends that live together in the sky?

God, Santa, Fairy, Spiderman and this guy (Jayin points to an action figure lying on the floor of his room), you know who he is? His name is Stone.

So are they all the same?

Well, they all have different powers, but God is the leader. They all listen to God.

What is the difference between God, Stone, Spiderman, Fairy and Santa?

Spiderman can run the fastest and Stone looks like stone so he's strong and Santa is nice and Fairy can fly. But sometimes Fairy and Santa fight because Santa likes to fly with his sled too. Also everyone is a man except Fairy.

So Fairy is a girl?

Yeah. And sometimes she is the boss of Santa and sometimes of God, Spiderman and Stone.
So what makes her the boss?

She gives them all of their clothes and tells them what to wear.

Is there anything else she does to be the boss?

No. She doesn't really be their boss she just helps them with things like that. They are all so funny!

They sound like they are very good friends of yours.

Yeah, I like them. And you know where they live in the sky?

No. Where do they live in the sky?

They have a house made of clouds and bricks and food...so they don't have to be hungry. So if they are hungry, they can just eat the food.

So what kind of food is the house made from?

The brick is the roof. But the house is made from cabbage, celery, cucumbers, lots of things. Everything in the world everyone eats, that's what they eat. You they had to make their house. You know how they made it? They had to make a farm to grow the cucumber and celery and everything and then they could build their house. But that was a long time ago.

Really?

> *Yeah, they are very, very old. So Stone, Spiderman, Fairy, Santa and God are the most powerful in the whole world. But, do you know who else is the most strong in the whole world?*
>
> No, who?
>
> *My Dad! He is stronger than Stone and stronger than Spiderman, and stronger than Fairy, and stronger than Santa and stronger than God. My dad is so strong, he can lift up anything in my room!*

We then spent a few minutes discussing Jayin's relationship with his father since his parents divorced as well as the impact of moving into a different home from his father. Jayin explained that he sometimes misses his dad, especially at night time and often worries about him being lonely at night. However, he explained that because he was able to see his father after school during the week and on the weekends for "sleep-overs" spending time with his father was very fun. Jayin also expressed liking both of his bedrooms, but that the one in his mom's house was his "real" one because it is where he spent most of his time. Jayin did not appear saddened or distressed by this conversation and was able to speak factually about his current family circumstances. Hence, we continued our conversation about his dad's strength and powers and the comparison Jayin's made to his special beings.

> So your Dad is stronger than all of your friends in the sky, wow! Does he have magic powers too?
>
> *No, he doesn't have any magic because all of his magic ran out. Now he's just really strong.*
>
> So can you Dad get his magic back?
>
> *He has to ask God. None of us have our magic anymore, we have to ask God for our magic back.*
>
> How do you do that?
>
> *Well, you can ask him, but he probably says no because mostly we aren't very good using magic.*
>
> Have you ever asked God for your magic back?
>
> *I already did. That's how come I have my laser eyes...that's magic, that's how I can see him.*
>
> So does God or any of his other friends ever come to you when you are not scared?

Yeah, sometimes he comes to talk or to play. Sometimes he'll play Yu-gi-oh with me.

So what kinds of things do you talk about?

See this (points to a cut on his finger)? I tell him about my owwie and he helps me feel better.

How does he do that?

Well, he comes here, sometimes with his friends, and they are all so silly and funny.

So, they make you laugh?

Yeah. They're so silly that I laugh and then my owwie goes away. Well also that they are also friends with Batman, so sometimes he comes too.

Although Jayin did not report specific language or ethnic identify issues as raised by Serena, his attempt to integrate both his own culture and Western culture in forming a bicultural identity, was apparent in his notions of spirituality. Specifically, I was fascinated by Jayin's integration of characters from North American children's culture (i.e., Santa, Spiderman, Fairy, and Stone) with divine figures from his own Hindu or Sikh culture (i.e., God, Gurunanak or Bagwan). His spirituality also incorporated Sikh and Hindu cultural practices, such as praying (i.e., jiya) to create his own unique and functional spiritual practice. As we continued our dialogue, Jayin went on to describe other superheroes that came to visit him and were also friends with the five characters who lived in the sky. The detail of his descriptions and the confidence and conviction with which he spoke made it easy to become engaged in his mythology. It wasn't long before I could visualize his experiences and his room truly came to life for me. I also found myself emotional at times when his words held particular importance within my own spiritual framework. For example, I was especially moved by his statement regarding our "magic running out" and how his Dad had no more magic left, but Jayin still did. The idea that children maintain their "magic" is one of the principles that inspired this research.

Understanding of His Own Origin

I wondered if Jayin had ideas regarding his origin, his birth and how he arrived into his current family. If so, I was curious if these views were integrated at all with his "friends in the sky".

Jayin, can you tell me how came to be a part of this family?

I was born from my mommy.

And how did you get born from your mommy?

All of those five, you know, God, Santa, Stone, Spiderman and Fairy? They carried me to my mommy's tummy and that's how I got to my mommy.

So they carried you into your mommy's tummy?

Well, one carried me, but the other ones helped.
Do you know what I look like before?

No.

I was very old, but I was small like a baby. And, my name was Ash and now my name is Jayin.

Okay. And when your name was Ash, where were you?

When I was Ash, I lived in the clouds.

With your five friends in the Vegetable house?

No, in different clouds. It was close to them, by ours was a very tiny cabin.

So could you see them from your tiny cabin?

Yeah, I could even play with them.

Was there anyone else in the house with you?

Lots of other old babies.

Like you?

Yes, like me.

So why did get carried here and become Jayin.

Because I wanted to try to take care of myself. So I asked God to let me get carried down here.

Oh. So was anyone else with you when you got carried?

No.

And where was your mom?

She was in someone's tummy too.

So did it take a long time for you to get carried here?

No. See, my Nani (Hindi word for maternal grandmother) grew my mom, then my mom grew me and my brother, and that's how I am here. It didn't take a long time to happen.

Does anyone in your family know about when your name was Ash?

No, it's a secret too.

Well thank you so much for sharing so many of your secrets with me today, Jayin.

You're welcome (he reaches over and gives me a big hug and kiss on the cheek). Do you wanna play tic-tac-toe with me now?

Sure, let's play.

As our interview came to a natural end, and we began to play, I noticed a change in Jayin and in our interaction style compared to moments ago during the interview. He shifted from the role of the teacher, to that of a friend and playmate. It was then that I became aware again of Jayin's age and realized that we had been in our interview for about 75 minutes, much longer than I would have expected for a four year old. After playing together for a short time, I confirmed with Jayin that we were to meet again soon to talk again. I thanked both him and Serena again for their time and hospitality. We arranged to meet again in the family home in approximately two weeks time.

Second Meeting

When I arrived to the family home, Serena answered the door and Jayin ran over to greet me. Without hesitation he gave me a big hug and started telling me about his day. Serena smiled down at him and asked that he give me a moment to remove my coat and set down my supplies. "He's been excited for your visit all day", she said. Looking down at Jayin I said, "I have too".

After briefly hearing about Jayin's day, I asked him for a few moments with Serena before starting our "special time" together again. Serena and I then sat down so that I could provide her with both interview transcripts from our last meeting. After I requested that she review both documents while I spoke to Jayin upstairs she shared with me that Jayin had been talking about God, Fairy, Santa, Spiderman and Stone all week. She remarked on being surprised by his stories, as they were completely new to her and wondered if his stories resulted from our time together. She also shared a theory that Jayin had told her about the falling of the tree leaves during autumn. He explained to her that the trees that lose their leaves have diarrhea and are sick. He also explained that the evergreens are helped by God and that is why they don't get sick anymore have diarrhea (lose their leaves). I asked Serena what her feelings and thoughts were about Jayin's stories and theories. She expressed feeling very surprised that he thought about these issues, but pleased that he had created a way to understand the world around him. I too, was very happy that Jayin decided to share his experiences and ideas of spirituality with his mother and wondered if feeling accepted or validated for his views after sharing them with me was perhaps the catalyst.

I then went upstairs for my second interview with Jayin. He was waiting for me in his bedroom and as soon as I entered his room, he shut the door.

> Hi Jayin! It is really nice to see you again. I see that you have chosen to spend time in your bedroom again. This is a pretty special room, hey?
>
> *It is the coolest room in the world! Hey look at my Batman toy.*
>
> Wow, I like your Batman toy.
>
> *Batman is super strong and fights all the bad people, like Scarecrow.*
>
> Who's Scarecrow?
>
> *He's a really bad guy that does bad things and Batman helps fight him away.*
>
> Does anyone else help Batman fight the bad guy scarecrow?
>
> *Remember, I told you last time, Spiderman, Stone, God, Santa, and Fairy help. Actually, Batman helps them fight the bad guys.*
>
> Oh, right, I remember. So how do they all help Batman fight the bad guy?
>
> *They come down from the sky, from their house in the sky and help Batman!! Then they go back to the sky and have fun because they are funny and silly, remember?*
>
> I do remember. Jayin, are there any other reasons or times you get scared or maybe angry?
>
> *Sometimes I get scared at school because I can't find my friends to play with.*
>
> Are you able to find them?
>
> *Yeah, usually I just didn't see them yet.*

So do you have friends at school to play with?

Yes, I have Thomas and Jeremy. We play soccer and other games at recess.

That's sounds like a lot of fun! Are there other times that you feel scared or maybe angry?

Sometimes I get angry at my brother because he doesn't share his toys with me, but then he does because I tell my mom.

And your mom helps your brother learn to share?

Yeah.
Jayin, do you ever feel that you are different from your friends or other children?

No, but we do different things.

Okay. Do you ever feel like maybe you look different or eat different things or pray differently than your other friends?

No.

I spent some more time exploring specific immigrant-related concerns that were raised by Serena during the initial parental interview to understand how these might be impacting Jayin from his perspective. Throughout our conversation, Jayin did not directly discuss any specific immigrant-related challenges from his own perspective. However, his identification of being similar to other children in his class and his bi-cultural notion of spirituality revealed a sense of his own ethnic identity.

Do you know when I get scared I can have fun with Santa too?

Oh really?

Yeah, look over here. (He takes me over to his bedside table, which has a Santa lamp on it).

Wow, so this is where Santa is?

Yeah, but it's not real.

So, Santa is not real?

No, (laughs) Santa is real, but this is just a pretend Santa.

Oh. So when you talked to me about Santa coming into your room and making you laugh, were you talking about the pretend Santa or the real Santa?

The real Santa who lives in the clouds! He can find all of the bad people in the world and tell God and Fairy who they are. Did you know he makes a list of all the bad people in the world?

No, I didn't know that.

Yeah. And then he helps catch them and help them get better.

So bad people can get better?

Sometimes.

Only sometimes.

Yeah, only sometimes. Sometimes if they ask for help. Like Darthvator, he was a bad guy, but now he is a good guy because he asked for help.

So who do they ask for help?

God and Santa and Fairy and Spiderman and Stone. They do magic to help people laugh and play so they feel better.

So Jayin, when I was downstairs talking to your mom, she told me a story that you told her about God and the trees and leaves falling down. Can you tell me that story?

God makes the plants grow. He's the one who doesn't make the green trees fall off. You know those prickly ones? He doesn't make those ones fall off.

How does he not make those ones fall off?

He uses powers to stay them on.

What about the leaves that fall off? What happens to the leaves that fall off?

Those ones are sick tress, the other ones are not.

Oh. So why are those other trees sick?

I don't know, but God only helps the prickly ones.

How come?

Because the prickly trees need help keeping their leaves, but the other ones need to get better and help themselves.

So, if they help themselves what happens?

Then they get their leaves back.

Oh. How does God know which trees are good and which trees are sick?

He just knows. But God only helps people the trees that are a little bit strong already.

What about you, does God help you?

Yeah, because I am already so strong. But, I can make myself feel better too.

You can? How?

I play a lot and I listen. I just think of playing and they all come to play with me.

We continued to discuss Jayin's experiences with his five friends and his thoughts and views about what we had discussed in our first interview. His answers and views were identical, and perhaps more detailed at times, than our last session. When I would make purposeful errors about certain aspects of his stories, he would respond with slight frustration that I wasn't able to remember all of the details of his teachings. He then began sharing a story about his great, great grandfather who had recently passed away in India.

You know what? My great, great Grandfather, he died.

So what happens when your grandfather died?

The doctor tries to fix you and if they can't you die in the hospital.

And what happens after the hospital?

He comes back to life and then he dies again. He died six times already.

What do you mean he died six times? How did he come to life again.

I don't know, he just comes to life again.

What did he look like when he came to life again?

Like a baby. Like an old baby.

So where is he now?

In the little cabin house in the clouds next to the Vegetable house.

Is that the same house where you were before you grew in your mommy?

Yeah.

Oh. So do you get to see your great, great, grandfather?

No, not anymore. Not until I am an old baby again.

When will that be?

After I die. Are you a mommy?

No, I don't have a baby.

You are a nice mommy. You know my brother grew in my mommy's tummy too?

Oh really? So where were you when your brother was in your mommy's tummy?

I waited to grow in my mommy's tummy.

How come?

I wasn't ready yet. When I was ready, God carried me into my mommy's tummy to grow.

How did you know that you were ready?

I don't remember that part.

We concluded our interview shortly after this conversation and after playing a few games upstairs in his room. I then had an opportunity to speak with Serena about the initial interview transcripts as well as the content of my follow-up interview with Jayin. Serena did not have any changes or alterations for her interview other than corrections regarding the spelling of certain religious words. She expressed amazement regarding the content of Jayin's interview, specifically regarding how detailed and elaborate his own spirituality was. She also remarked on how serious and interested in his views I appeared in the document and admitted that she never really took his stories that seriously. She reflected on the value this might have for her son and wondered if she would be able to utilize his "friends" in helping him work through his difficulties and sadness from the divorce. We spoke for a few more minutes about other concerns and about Jayin's second interview. Serena validated the death of her grandfather in India and stated that Jayin's views of having many lives had never been discussed with him before and she wondered about the origin of this belief. Overall, Serena seemed extremely open to her son's views and expressed a desire to validate and utilize his unique spirituality in her parenting of Jayin.

Saying Goodbye

I thanked Serena and Jayin again for their time, contribution and warm welcome into their home. We all congregated at the doorway and lingered in conversation for a few more minutes. Jayin then gave me another big hug and kiss on the cheek before running off upstairs to his bedroom, laughing and singing, "Spiderman, Spiderman, does whatever a spider can…"

Chapter 9

INTERVIEWING KUSHI

The next interview is with a four year old girl named, Kushi. Kushi, which is the pseudonym that was selected by her mother for this presentation, means "happy" in the family's first language of Gujarati, which is East Indian in origin. I smiled when she chose this name, because it suits Kushi's personality and way of being very, very well. In all the time I spent with Kushi, she almost always had a smile on her face; and, it was the kind of smile that truly lights up a room. She and her smile were mesmerizing and contagious, which was a true joy to be around.

Introduction

Kushi currently lives at home with both of her parents, an older sister who is seven, and a younger brother who is two years of age. Kushi participated in the interview process with her mother, Nagma. When I first spoke to Nagma about her and Kushi's involvement in this project, she stated a sincere interest and desire to participate. Nagma explained that she is presently completing her PhD in comparative literature and would like the opportunity to support the research of other doctoral students. In addition, she expressed interest in the topic of children's spirituality, with particular curiosity in learning about her daughter's views. Although Nagma declared spirituality to be an important part of her family's life, she was unsure of Kushi's awareness or endorsement of these views because of her age. As a consequence, she warned that Kushi may not be an appropriate candidate for my research, particularly due to her age, but that she would be interested in trying nonetheless.

Since Nagma worked and studied on campus, she requested that we schedule our interviews in the university clinic for her convenience. In addition, she expressed interest in observing the interview process with Kushi. On the day of the initial interviews, Nagma and Kushi arrived together. Nagma introduced me to Kushi who did not immediately look at me and appeared shy and somewhat anxious. Nagma stated that Kushi was a very outgoing child, but often took time to engage with new people. I reassured Nagma and Kushi that we would take all the time we needed to get to know one another before we started. This seemed to relieve Kushi, who was then able to look at me, smile and say, "Hello". Given Kushi's initial shyness, I decided that the three of us would spend some time together before initiating the parent interview process. Since Kushi would be required to remain in the waiting area by herself while her mom and I spoke, I was concerned that leaving her alone would increase her anxiety about the research process. So, Nagma, Kushi, and I went into a private clinic room where we talked, coloured, and played with some of my puppets for about 15 minutes. After this time, Kushi's personality, humour and happy nature emerged. With this level of comfort, she was able to comfortably sit in the waiting area while Nagma and I completed the parent interview process.

Immigration and Cultural background

Nagma and her husband married in 1997 and immigrated to Canada in 1998 from Gujarat, India. Between the years 1995 and 1998, Nagma's husband made several trips back and forth between India and Canada to orient himself to the culture and to consider Canada as a potential country for their migration. According to Nagma, neither she nor her husband were looking for a new place to settle permanently, but were curious about short-term oversees opportunities. Specifically, the couple considered Canada for temporary employment and additional educational training. As well, both of their immediate and extended families reside in India and it was important for them that Nagma and her husband settle near by. However, when the couple received their visas, they made the decision to come to Canada and quickly made arrangements to leave India. At the time, Nagma admits feeling apprehension with their decision as she was already 5 months pregnant and was not likely to work or attend school.

> *Actually when we came, I didn't think seriously about coming here at all because we were both in very settled jobs and there was no motivation for us to leave India at all. Anyways, by the time we got our visa and arrived in Canada, I was already 5 months pregnant with my first child, my first daughter. And after we had the baby in Canada, that really changed our perspective a lot, we started thinking from the perspective of our child. But, after a few months, we went back to India with the baby and stayed for about 5 months. By the time we were thinking of whether we wanted to stay in Canada or in India, we were still thinking about it. Like I hadn't resigned from my job in India. In fact, I didn't resign for three years after I immigrated here, so it took me long to decide whether I was going to stay here or not. But in the mean time, political situation, especially in Gujarat became a bit volatile. And*

> *again, we started thinking from the child's perspective, so we just settled down. That's basically it, we decided to stay and now we feel pretty settled.*

Nagma and I then discussed some of the challenges she and her family had and are currently having regarding their adjustment to living in Canada. Nagma explained that the most difficult challenge has been not having any friends or family support in Canada, particularly with raising their three children.

> *The family support is still an issue for us. Even if we have to do something, it's either my husband goes or I go, we both cannot go and therefore a lot of our personal life is not there. Like we cannot go out and watch a movie or go for dinner or hang out with friends. We don't actually have time together as a couple as much because either one of us has to stay home with the children. It is very difficult for both of us. It is also a problem that the children do not have any contact with their grandparents. They are missing out a lot on family. They are missing out a lot on Grandma stories. Also I am missing having someone to run to when I am not in the right frame of mind, and they also don't have anyone else to run to if they are angry or upset with me. Between myself and my husband we try that one of us pulls the other. So if the children are thinking, "okay Mommy is angry, I'll go to Dad now", but yes, those day to day routine things with the family, that I think they do miss out on a lot. Myself, I also miss my friends more than my family too. I miss my special, personal best friends.*

Nagma also discussed the winter weather being an additional challenge for her personally as well as with her parenting. Specifically, she expressed difficulties adjusting to winter customs, dress, and activities for children in Canada. Finally, Nagma explained that the home life in Canada, particularly housework, was a very difficult adjustment.

> *Coming from India, we are not used to doing so much housework. Because basically, we, my husband and I, grew up in households where we had 2-3 maids and we had someone who took care of our dishes and the laundry guy would come every day and pick up our laundry and then be back the next day all done. Other than my career and what I was pursuing at school, I did not really need to worry about other things. So I guess the other thing I also need to worry about here is balancing the housework with the other things I am doing. Canada life is very hard that way, especially for the woman.*

I asked Nagma about challenges in finding suitable employment and in their communication skills in English. In both of these cases, Nagma explained that she and her husband were able to communicate well because both were taught in English-medium schools in India. With regards to employment, he was able to find work teaching "management" at a local college and Nagma, as stated earlier, is currently enrolled in her PhD. Regarding Kushi's life challenges, Nagma stated the following:

> *I am presuming that one of her challenges might be probably not having enough time with me as she might want to. Because she is in a full time program, she leaves first thing in the morning, then she comes home at about 5:30pm and then we eat our dinner and spend about one hour or so together before bedtime and then weekend she is home with us. But on a day to day basis, she might not feel like she is with us enough. I am presuming that she will have another answer, but maybe this is one thing.*
> *And here second challenge is probably physical. In the sense where she wears glasses, is allergic and has eczema on her face and asthma. I don't know if she will see this as a challenge, but sometimes I do think that is a challenge for her because it effects what she is able to do. Also her eyes, her vision is not very good, and her glasses are quite thick and she looks different from other four year olds and that might be a challenge for her as well. I am not sure how much she sees this as a challenge, it might just be us, you know, at least from the adult point of view.*

Nagma further explained that Kushi is also starting to wonder why she and her family have different holidays and celebrations than her Canadian friends. For example, Nagma explained that during Christmas, Kushi wondered why Santa Claus did not visit their home and why they did not receive any presents or put up a Christmas tree. Nagma said that although this topic passed after the holidays, she wonders if Kushi is still curious about these cultural differences.

Nagma reported that both she and her husband would identify themselves generally as Indian. But, depending on whom they were speaking with and their awareness of Indian culture would also include Gujarati, Shi'a Muslim, or Gujarati-Muslim. As far as Kushi and the other children were concerned, Nagma explained:

> *For my children, even though they speak Gujarati fluently, they would not identify themselves as Gujarati because that would be confusing them too much. Because they know that they are Indian and that their grandparents are in India and that we cook Indian food, like that. But apparently they are Canadian, so they would probably identify themselves as Canadian too. They would probably also identify themselves more with religion than I identify myself with religion because apparently there is more on our part to educate them with religion. For example my eldest daughter attends religious school at the Mosque to learn basically the principals of Islam, Arabic, the prayers, and that. So she would also probably say she is Muslim.*

Family's Spirituality, Religious Beliefs, and Practices

Kushi and her family are Muslim and currently follow the Ishnashari Shi'a tradition of Islam. Nagma explains that she was born a Sunni Muslim but did not practice her faith or consider her faith to be a critical part of her life or spiritual belief system. As such, the family chose follow her husband's religious affiliation as it is a very important part of his life, his upbringing and his present daily practice and lifestyle. As such, the family attends a Shi'a mosque regularly and their eldest daughter attends religious education classes weekly, which started at the age of five years, where she learns about Islam and teachings of the Qu'ran.

At home, with Kushi, the family speaks of Allah as a higher being that is benevolent and available to help people in times of difficulties or stress, but also relies on people trying to help themselves. Nagma explains that she tells her children, "You have to work hard and do the best you can, and then you can ask God for strength and support. You cannot just pray and not study, it doesn't work that way". So, when the children are having problems, Nagma would encourage them to find a solution and also to pray or take the name of God (repeated chant). Other than this, Nagma states that she and her husband don't talk to or teach their children about religious rituals or practices directly outside of attending their mosque. However, both she and her husband educate their children about the values of their faith.

> *We teach them that it is important to take care of less privileged people, give food and financial donations to them, and to be accepting of people's differences. Especially in Canada, because they see that everyone comes from different backgrounds, cultures and religions. So generally we tend to address the different practices and to be accepting of the different practices. This would be in line with what we would call spirituality at home and it is based on basic human rights.*

Nagma and I completed our interview and went outside to retrieve Kushi. Once again, the three of us spent time together playing before making our way to the playroom. After Kushi seemed comfortable again with me, I reviewed the assent form and explained the purpose and process of the interview with her. We then escorted her mother to the observation room and proceeded to the playroom to begin our interview together.

It was important for Kushi to see where her mom was "waiting", although I do not think she understood that her mom would be able to see her in the playroom. This was evidenced mid-way through the interview when Kushi wanted to go and look for her mother to make sure she was still there. When I suggested that she knock on the window and ask for a knock back, she seemed confused and asked to go to the room directly and check in on her mom, which we did.

Meeting Kushi

Once we were inside the playroom, Kushi seemed quite open and extremely friendly and started talking right away. I encouraged Kushi to explore the playroom and explained to her that she was able to use anything in the playroom during our time together and that there were not right or wrong answers.

So how is everything with you today Kushi?

I love my school.

Is there anyone at school who you like the most?

Yes, my favourite friend is Christina.

What makes her your favourite friend?

Well, today she hit me like this...(Kushi slapped both hands up and down in the air).

So did she hurt you, or was she playing?

Maybe she was just playing...I don't know (laughs).

Did it hurt you when she did that?

A little bit.

Is there anyone at school that you don't like? Who are not your friends?

Yeah, all the boys. They get mad at me.

So what do you do?

Tell the teacher. Then they get in trouble. Hey this school house opens into a classroom! (Kushi finds a portable school house model and a box of figurines of children, adults and animals and places them on the playroom carpet. She then takes a figurine from the box and puts her inside the school). She goes in here because she is ugly.

So ugly people go in the school?

No, just her because she is ugly.

What about everyone else at the school.

No, they are not ugly.

Oh.

Hey, look at this angel! (Kushi pulls out a female figure dressed in a long gown with wings.)

What is an angel?

She is someone that flies into the sky. There are hundreds of angels and they are all very, very pretty. We need to put in other people in the school. (Kushi selects two adult figures and several other child figures and places them inside the school).

Who are these two? (I point to the adult figures).

They are the leaders of the school. They are both very pretty too, see? So are these kids (she points to the other male and female child figures she has placed in the school)

So what happens to people in the school who are not very pretty?
(Kushi shouts and hits the 'ugly girl' with the pretty female adult leader)

So pretty people don't like the ugly girl in the school?

No, they don't.

Oh, I see.

I am pretty, you know?

Oh?

Yes, and you know what else? I like pretty new clothes. Can we go in there? (Kushi points to a large tent set up in the playroom).

I wondered if discussing the "ugly girl" at school had been a difficult topic for Kushi and if that is why she changed the subject. Or, if what she was about to share with me would demonstrate a way of working through her difficult feelings. Kushi's glasses and eczema were clearly visible components of her appearance and I wondered how she had learned to manage any feelings of difference or hostility that she might experience at school. I also wondered how her racial minority status (dark skin), might interact with her vision and skin problems in contributing to her feeling of difference from others as well as their views of her. For example, does she hold self-beliefs about being "pretty" as a way to reconcile her inner way of being with her feelings of being "ugly" at times, particularly at school?

Sure! (Kushi enters the tent and I remain outside near the doorway). Wow, you can really go right into there, I don't think that I can fit inside with you.

Yeah, but you can sit close by.

Okay, thanks! So what is it like inside there?

It's magic in here, just like those magic stars on the wall over there! (She points to glow-in-the-dark stars that have been affixed to the wall of the playroom).

So what makes the tent and the stars magic?

Well, if you touch the stars, you can go anywhere you want.

Can you show me how it works?

Okay (Kushi lifts her hands up to be picked up and then gestures to be taken to the wall. So, I carry her over to where the stars are displayed). So first you touch it, then you spin it upside down (she pretends to spin the star around) and then you make your wish! You say "magic, magic, magic star" and make your wish and then it comes true!

How does the star know what you wish for?

It just does!
So what would you wish for?

To go to Disneyland!!!

Wow, what is it about Disneyland that you like so much?

Everything! Do you know Aurora?

No, who is Aurora?

She is a fire-breathing dragon! (Kushi goes over to the stuffed animal dragon on the play mat and puts her hand in the dragon's mouth and laughs). But if she wants to play with us, she can't use her fire, okay?

Okay. "Did you hear that Aurora, no fire, okay". (I then took on the voice of the dragon). How are you Kushi? Do you want to play together?

(Kushi laughs). I am good today dragon. Let's go flying around, okay? But, no fire, okay?

(Voice of Dragon). Sure, where do you want to fly to?

Actually, you are too scary. Farah, can we bury him (she changed dragon's gender) somewhere?

Sure we can. Where would you like to bury him?

Kushi took the large stuffed dragon and pushed it underneath a beanbag chair in the corner of the playroom and expressed feeling much "safer" now that the scary dragon with fire was gone. She then spent some time wandering around the playroom looking through more of the toys and supplies.

Finally, she gravitated towards the sandtray and started playing with sand. She then noticed many of the figurines and artifacts set up around the room. I informed her that she could use any of these figurines and objects inside the sandtray, if she would like to. Kushi perused the figurines and then exclaimed, "Oh, look! You have Disney princess. They are my favourite!" She brings several of them over to the sand tray and begins to place them in the sand.

Kushi and the Disneyland Princesses

In the following play interaction with Kushi, I noticed that she specifically selected several female dolls that she identified as "beautiful" and "pretty" out of a range of possible female figures available to her in the playroom. The dolls she chose were the fair-skinned Disney princesses rather than the darker-skinned characters also available such as "Pocahontas" and "Jasmine", which were all placed side by side. In the sequence of play that follows, however, Kushi identified the "pretty", fair-skinned dolls as "bad", possibly reflecting feelings of anger and hostility towards her European-Caucasian peers who were bullying her. At the same time, Kushi's desire to become a pretty princess that comes out in her play sequence below seems to also suggest a desire to fit in and look like those whose appearances are valued in mainstream society.

What do you like about Disneyland, Kushi?

I like all of these princesses. See, this one's Ariel (picks up the figurine). She is a nice and pretty princess. And see this one? (She points to the evil witch from Sleeping Beauty). She is the bad witch. She is not nice to Arial all of the time because sometimes Arial should be in her own castle and not bother the witch.

Oh, so where is her castle?

(Kushi finds a plastic castle and places it on the other side of the sandtray). See, she has to get over there, back to her castle.

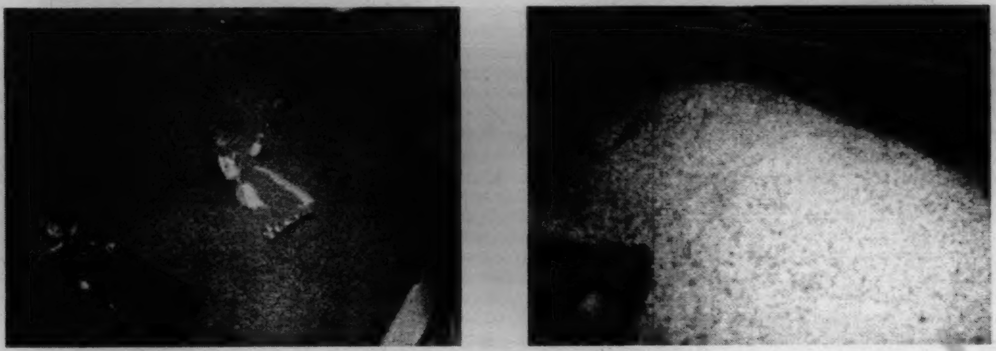
Oh, so how did she get on this side?

She fell down by mistake and now she has to get back. (Kushi now places several other Disney princesses next to Arial including Belle, and Cinderella). See, they are all pretty princesses, but they are in trouble. Now they are all going to walk over to their castle. Oh, oh! The witch is being so mean and now the princesses have fallen down. (Kushi places the princesses half-way towards the castle then drops them onto their backs. Then, she starts to bury all three of the princesses in the sand). See, they were being bad and so now they have to be buried.

Oh, so when they are bad, they are buried?

Yes, then they have to start again with the witch. Now they have to try to get back to their castle again. (Kushi places them half-way to the castle again and then buries all three of the princesses again). See, they were bad again.

Figure 14: Burying the Princesses



So how do the princesses feel when they are bad?

They are okay, they just have to try again. (Kushi repeats this process several times again) We have to keep burying them...bury, bury, bury...Don't forget about her hand (pointing to a part of Belle's hand still showing out of the sand. We thoroughly bury all three princesses). See, now they are all good again and can go home to their castle. (Kushi now uncovers each of the characters and places them next to the caste). See, now they are all friends.

Kushi pauses at this point and asks to see her mom, so we take a quick break to do so. After saying hello and asking if she could "play longer", we returned to the playroom. When we returned to the playroom, Kushi begins exploring the playroom further and is specifically interested in the dress-up section.

Wow, you have a tiara? Can I try it on? (She places the tiara on top of her head with a big smile). Wow! Do you have a mirror I can look at?

(I point her towards a length-wise mirror in the room).

Wow, I look like a pretty princess.

Yes you do! Kushi, have you ever been to Disneyland?

Not for real life.

Have been another way?

I go in my head and at night time. I get to see all of the princesses. They live in the castle and when I go, I get to live in the castle too because then I am a princess too. Cinderella is my favourite.

How come?

Because she gets to go to a Ball.

She does? And what do you like about the Ball?

The dancing!! I love dancing! (Kushi starts spinning and dancing around the room laughing).

So do you dance when you are happy?

Yes, but, also when I am mad. See? (Kushi dances around the room with an angry face and begins grunting). See, I have an angry face when I am mad! But then I get happy again because I love dancing like Cinderella.

Figure 15: Kushi Dancing

Resiliency

I was curious to learn more about ways in which dancing and the princesses helped Kushi during times of sadness and when she was feeling happy. I also wanted to pursue Kushi's "night time" visits to Disneyland to visit the princesses.

So, you know that dancing makes you feel better!

Yeah! But it's a secret.

How come?

Because it is only for princesses.

Oh.

You know who the most special princess is? Tinkerbelle. She's prettier than all of the other princesses. And she's the princess of all the princesses because she flies!

Do you ever talk to Tinkerbelle about things that go wrong or things that you are sad about?

Yes. I talk to her about things that I like. All kinds of things at school and at home..

Do you ever talk to her when you are feeling sad, or when you are mad?

Yes. Sometimes I am mad at Christina at school and sometimes I am sad because my mommy doesn't play with me.

When to you talk to Tinkerbelle about these things?

At night time. At 11 o'clock. When I am sleeping.

Do you ever go when you are awake?

Sometimes, but it's a secret with Tinkerbelle. But, I talk to her lots.

And where do you talk to her?

In Disneyland. It's far, far away.

Can you tell me how you get to Disneyland?

At night time, Santa comes to get me from my bedroom and we go to Disneyland to see Tinkerbelle, but only I can see her. She does this magic dance and gives me a magic tiara to put on. When I put it on, I'm happy again. Can we find the magic tiara again? (She places it on her head). See, now I am a pretty princess!

So does being pretty and being happy go together?

Yes! All princesses are happy and pretty, like me! And, whoever wears the tiara for a long time, that means they are so, so special.

Figure 16: Magic Tiara

Kushi and I spent more time discussing Tinkerbelle, Santa and her visits to Disneyland. Kushi mentioned that she goes to Disneyland sometimes when she is at school when the other children are "mean to her", and when she is at home and her sister "is mean" to her. There was a clear connection between Disneyland, becoming a princess and Kushi's attempts at feeling better. She also explained that sometimes Tinkerbelle and Cinderella would teach her how to dance, laugh and use magic wishes to feel happy.

I also asked Kushi about the name Allah and God and about attending mosque and prayers. Kushi stated not knowing the name Allah or what they did when they went to mosque. She explained that mosque was where the girls sat different from the "mean boys", but was not able to say much more that that even after sufficient prompting and questions. Finally, I asked Kushi about her own cultural identity and how she would describe herself and her family. She said: "I am a princess, but I don't know what my family is", minimizing attention to any racial or cultural difference on her part. In addition, Kushi's play sequence involving the princesses discussed above seems to further suggest some racial-identity concerns. When I asked what country her parents were from, she said India, but did not connect this to her own identity or "culture" in any way during our interview.

After ending our first interview, Kushi and I retrieved Nagma from the observation room, where Kushi greeted her with a huge hug and comments of the "fun" we had together and descriptions of the toys that were in the playroom. Kushi did not seem to be aware that her mom had viewed the session. We scheduled our next interview in three weeks time and said good-bye.

Second Meeting

Nagma had contacted me after the first interview to ask if she could be emailed the transcripts ahead of time as she would not be able to be present for the entire time scheduled for our second interview. I agreed and sent out the information to her a week prior to our second interview. Upon arriving to the university clinic on the day of the second interview, Nagma, Kushi and I went into a small clinic room to talk and greet one another. After a few moments, Kushi went outside to play in the waiting area while Nagma and I reviewed the transcripts.

Nagma did not have any concerns, changes, or clarifications regarding her transcript. We then discussed her thoughts about observing Kushi's interview and reading her transcripts. Overall, Nagma was not surprised by Kushi's love and fascination for princesses and Disneyland. Nagma explained that although the family had not yet made a visit to Disneyland, Kushi had developed a keen interest after receiving a Cinderella doll as a gift over a year ago and seeing the movie shortly after. Nagma was also not surprised that Kushi did not mention Allah, or God in any of our discussions given Kushi's limited exposure to formal learning in Islam; however, she was surprised that Kushi did not recall or explain much about mosque or about being Indian.

Regarding Kushi's view about herself, particularly her appearance, Nagma expressed happiness that her daughter is able to see herself as "pretty" and transform herself into a "princess" whenever she felt sad, hurt, or angry. This pleased Nagma a great deal, who expressed concern about how Kushi copes with her physical differences. We then discussed Kushi's ability to create an imaginary world of escape for herself and wondered what it would be like for her if she actually had the opportunity to visit Disneyland with her family. Nagma stated that the family may make plans to go in the next year or two and also wondered if this would modify Kushi's belief system in any way. We then completed our portion of the interview and proceeded to the waiting area where Kushi was patiently drawing. Nagma explained to Kushi that she would be back shortly, but would wait for Kushi in the waiting area. Kushi did not appear distressed by her mom leaving and happily waved good-bye before following me into the playroom.

It's so nice to see you hear again, Kushi! Welcome back to the playroom.

This is a special room.

Is it?

Yes, because you have the magic stars and the magic tiara. Can I see the tiara again?

> Sure. (I remove the tiara from a toy bin and hand it Kushi who immediately places it on her head. She then turned towards the stars on the wall and gestured to be picked up. I carried her so that she was able to touch the stars. Kushi then pretended to turn the largest star on the wall with her eyes closed.) Did you make a wish?
>
> *You'll see...just wait. See! Now we are here! Tinkerbelle came and now we are in Disneyland, see!*
>
> Wow, I didn't know that I could come with you to Disneyland.
>
> *Well, you're not a princess like me, so you can't see it, but I'll tell you what it looks like, okay? Do you see the stars in the sky? Oh, look, they have sparkles, they are so beautiful! Now we are going to Cinderella's ball to dance. Want to dance with me?*
>
> Sure, I'd love to!

Kushi took my hand and we began to spin around and move about the room. While we were dancing, I was asking her questions about the princesses, where they lived, what they did, and how they helped her. She explained that each of the princesses came to the ball to say hello to her and dance with her. I also wanted to know more about what Disneyland looked like. Kushi explained that Disneyland was full of castles, pretty princesses and pretty clothes. When asked what it reminded her of, Kushi said that it is "just like her bedroom at home when no one comes in". After re-playing our dance and several other visits around Disneyland, Kushi instructed me that it was time to go. She silently made a gesture as though beckoning someone and explained to me that Santa was here to take us back to the magic star. She then reached her arms up to be carried back to the star on the wall. She touched the star and then declared that we had arrived safely back in the "special room".

Kushi and I spent some more time exploring the playroom and the princess figurines displayed near the sand tray. Picking up one princess at a time, she shared their stories with me, which followed the basic premise of their Disney movies. Shortly after, we ended our time together and went out into the waiting area to find Nagma reading. Kushi ran towards her mother and gave her a big hug followed by a string of giggles.

Saying Goodbye

After thanking Kushi and Nagma for their time together and saying good-bye, the two left the university clinic holding hands. As for each of the children I learned from in this research endeavour, I had given Kushi a small wrapped gift and a certificate for participation before she left. I had chosen to buy her a Tinkerbelle doll that came with a child-size tiara. Within minutes of leaving, Kushi re-entered the university clinic wearing the tiara. I assume she had unpacked the gift while leaving. She gave me a big hug and said, "See, I am a pretty princess".

Chapter 10

IMMIGRATION, SPIRITUALITY, AND ADAPTATION

The purpose of this study was to explore spirituality among young children of immigrants adjusting to adverse life events and immigration stressors. The guiding research questions were: (a) How do children of immigrant families conceptualize and understand spirituality in their lives? (b) What are their experiences of spirituality? (c) What role does spirituality play in their attempt to understand, adjust to and respond to life challenges or adversity? Six immigrant parent-child dyads from various religious and secular spiritual frameworks were interviewed to address these research questions. The children were also engaged in play and creative activities to facilitate an understanding of their unique spiritual worlds. During interviews with the children, they were each asked generally about the impact of immigration-related stressors in their lives, and were also asked about specific challenges their parents perceived to be affecting them. Children's responses to these direct inquiries suggested they were deeply affected by challenges common among all children, such as bullying and peer relationships at school. However, despite children's lack of articulation of immigration stressors, when the children's self-reported life challenges were interpreted in the context of their parental interviews, play themes, and the functions of spirituality they described, several immigration-related life difficulties appeared to be impacting the children's post-migration family functioning. Moreover, the children's complex and elaborate views of spirituality clearly helped them to understand and adapt to these immigration challenges. This chapter will present themes related to immigration, spirituality, and adaptation that emerged from the children's interviews and will highlight the unique and common ways in which the children conceptualized and utilized spirituality in their lives.

Immigration Challenges

A central theme running through the multi-faceted research data was the experience of various forms of immigration challenges by the children. The parents of the participating children articulated several immigrant-related challenges that they perceived to be impacting their children's lives. However, when the children themselves were asked about the specific life stressors addressed by their parents, there was often no direct correspondence. That is, the life challenges identified by the children were different from those the parents perceived to be affecting them. Despite this lack of direct correspondence, many of the parents' concerns about their children as well as their own immigrant-related life stressors did appear in the children's play themes and functions of spirituality and were significant enough to warrant adaptation on the part of the children. The various immigration challenges that emerged in children's interview responses, play interactions and presenting problems are described below as sub-themes.

Food, Shelter, and Underemployment

When Olek's mother, Mira was interviewed, she reflected on the life stressors she and Eryk faced in their home country of Poland prior to their migration. Specifically, Mira spoke about the development of her survival skills due to the political turmoil and uncertainty in Poland and about challenges related to security and access to resources to have one's basic needs met, such as food. Mira further explained that their migration to Canada brought similar challenges such as finding appropriate housing, separation from family, downward mobility in employment and economic status, and establishing social supports. Since then, Mira explained that although her family has adjusted well to Canada, she and Eryk will likely never feel completely secure in having their basic needs met, nor will they expect support from the Canadian government to do so. Olek's interview responses suggested that he was impacted by his parents' underemployment and the financial challenges it created for his family.

During Olek's interview, he discussed having access to a "fancy express train" at night that would take him to visit the various "little Gods" that lived in different countries all over the world. In describing this, he mentioned visiting the Polish God, who lived in Poland, to give thanks for "his brother, his parents, and having food and friends". Similarly, when asked to expand on the role of "Big God", Olek explained that "He" supported the little Gods around the world to develop new foods for the people, highlighting the role of God in ensuring that people's basic needs are met. From Olek's perspective, the acquisition and sustenance of food as well as the presence of his family members were extremely valuable and important facets of his life for which he was thankful. With no direct association made to the immigration struggles of his parents, Olek articulated values and concerns similar to Mira and to many other immigrant families. Furthermore, as a way of coping with the potential loss of food and family, Olek allocated this responsibility to his concept of Big God and little Gods, who would use their magic powers to "fix things" and "help people get happier".

Mira discussed in elaborate detail, the family's financial struggles following their migration in part due to her and Eryk's unacceptable university credentials and resulting underemployment. Again, although Olek did not directly indicate concerns about his family's financial status, he made the following remark: "Sometimes I feel sad when I don't do the same things as my friends or when they have things that are better than mine, like games and things". Olek then creatively stated that he "solves" this problem by asking God for help, specifically, to "lower the prices in stores so that (Olek) can buy the toys (he) wants on sale".

Cultural and Social Isolation

When Rosie's mother, Sara, was interviewed she explained that since their migration from Hong Kong the primary challenges still affecting the family included English language acquisition, maintenance of Chinese cultural traditions, and separation from extended family members. With regards to the children specifically, Sara also felt that it was important for them to maintain their language skills in Cantonese and develop strong ties to their Chinese cultural identity by developing friendships and connections with other Chinese-Catholic immigrants. Although Sara expressed these views, she did not predict that Rosie would be experiencing any of these concerns directly or that she would be able to articulate them specifically; instead, Sara was worried that Rosie's shy personality and limited English language skills were inhibiting the development of her relationships with other children both at school and in their community.

When Rosie was interviewed, her play themes and spirituality clearly demonstrated immigrant-related challenges that paralleled those expressed by Sara. Through Rosie's play interactions with her cherished companion, Rainbow (her toy horse) we get a sense of her own perceived immigrant-related life challenges. Rosie introduced Rainbow as her "horse from China who immigrated to Canada" at the same time as Rosie did and who also "misses her family" who live in China. Although Rosie was born in Canada, her notion of having come from China "as a baby" demonstrates her cultural ties to her Chinese community and sense of loss and loneliness at having emotionally left her country of origin. To adjust to these feelings of loss and cultural isolation, Rosie rides on Rainbow's back and takes fantasy trips to China to live and play in a Chinese house and visit family. During these journeys, Rosie is able to psychologically maintain transnational ties to her culture and country of origin. Similarly, through her special friendship with Rainbow, who she identifies as a Chinese immigrant like herself, she is able to manage and adjust to feelings of social isolation and limited friendships with other children at her school and in her neighborhood while establishing close relationships with other, albeit make-believe, Chinese immigrants, like herself, with whom she can feel comfortable interacting in her own language.

Separation from Family

Jonas, Emilee's father, explained that their migration path from Cameroon to France and then to Canada created a dispersion of his extended family members and consequently separation and distance from many loved ones. Currently, Jonas and Marie have no extended family in Canada and both have siblings and parents who live in Cameroon and France. This separation has been extremely difficult for the couple, especially given their desire to ultimately return to Cameroon. Jonas explained the importance of the presence of extended family, particularly for his children, in order to maintain both familial and cultural ties to Cameroon and the French language. As such, Jonas, Marie and the children often visit their families in France and in Cameroon and have invited many able family members to visit their home in Canada. Furthermore, Jonas and Marie have made efforts to raise Emilee and her sisters within the cultural traditions of Cameroon including food, clothing, and use of French language at home. As a result, Jonas predicted that Emilee would likely demonstrate some confusion or dualism in her cultural identity and did not expect Emilee to have any sadness regarding separation from extended family members given her limited long-term exposure to most of these individuals.

In Emilee's play and interview disclosures, she revealed having difficulties sleeping at night, particularly when she is alone: "Well, I really don't like sleeping by myself at night time. I like it when someone else sleeps in my bed with me because then I don't get scared of the bad people and witches at night time". In further discussing Emilee's sleep difficulties, she explained that having others in the room with her, like her mother and grandmother, alleviated her bed-time fears and facilitated her ability to sleep through the night. Emilee's desire to be closer to her family in order to feel safe, particularly at night was reiterated when she spoke about being able visit her cousins, who she referred to as her "brother and sister" in France.

> You know what? If I could go anywhere I wanted to go, I would go visit my other brother and sister. They live in Paris...Because when we visit them, I get to sleep with them at night time and not be scared. Once, there were so many of us sharing a bed and I didn't even fall!

Emilee's sleep difficulties and night time fears, from her perspective, are alleviated when she has proximal contact with her family members. Therefore, her sleep difficulties are likely influenced by feelings of separation and distance from family members as a result of her family's migration.

Biculturalism and Ethnic Identity

A final immigration challenge that was evident from the child interviews involved the acculturation process and ethnic identity development. Serena, Jayin's mother, was concerned about Jayin's current struggles with understanding the colour of his skin. Specifically, she thought that he might wonder "why he is brown and others are white", and why his family speaks English, Hindi and Punjabi at home. As with many immigrant families, Serena discussed the importance of Jayin maintaining his Indian and Punjabi identity while still adapting to Canadian culture. Serena further commented, that "although Jayin is fluent in all three languages, lately, he only wants me to speak to him in English". This fact concerned her and she wondered how and if Jayin would be able to integrate both cultures into his self-identity.

In interviewing Jayin, his identity and bicultural integration was evident in his structure of spirituality, particularly in his concept of higher spiritual beings. Jayin utilized his Punjabi prayer style of performing "jiya" (kneeling down and bent over on the floor) to call upon "God" who is a figure he first accessed at the Gudawara and again in his home. In further explaining his concept of "God", he introduced other spiritual figures such as Santa, Spiderman, Stone and Fairy. All five of these higher beings were important to Jayin in forming and accessing his own spirituality. Jayin's concept of "God", which represents his Punjabi-Indian culture worked with other Canadian (Western) cultural figures, such as Santa and Spiderman, to support Jayin's daily life challenges and struggles. In this way, he found a way to reconcile his own biculturalism with a bicultural notion of spirituality.

Nagma, Kushi's mother, also raised similar concerns about Kushi's ethnic identity development as Serena did with Jayin. Specifically, Nagma wondered how Kushi would identify herself having been influenced by Indian, Muslim and Canadian cultures. Nagma also wondered how Kushi's physical appearance would influence her identity development. In Kushi's play, there was a definite recognition and appreciation of beautiful images, specifically, beautiful princesses. The distinct comparison between "ugly" and "beautiful" was also evident throughout Kushi's play sequences, where being "pretty or beautiful" was coveted and desirable. During her play, Kushi begins to identify herself as "pretty", like the princess she had identified, which were all Disney character princesses with European looking characteristics. I noticed that Kushi specifically did not select the characters (e.g., Jasmine or Pocahontas) with darker skin that were closer in racial appearance to her own, which may indicate her current stage of ethnic identity development and acculturation.

Existence of Divinity

Another key theme emerging from the children's disclosures and play interactions related to a notion of at least one divine being beyond the self that was present in their daily lives and with whom they described having a personal and intimate relationship. Their relationship with their respective divine being(s) was well utilized and extremely important, almost sacred to each of them. In addition, all of the children also described a world or setting in which this divine being could be accessed and utilized whenever they so desired, including when dealing with immigration challenges. It is also notable that the beings and worlds created by the children were benevolent characters that generated positive experiences for the children that were often reported to be "fun and exciting".

All of the children interviewed disclosed the existence of a higher being that had attributes generally associated with divine beings across religions, including power, magic, and healing abilities. The following are examples of each child's description of the existence of divine beings in their lives:

> There is a Big God that lives way up here, above the earth and he controls everything…he meets with other Little Gods all over the world…they have names like Special and Protector. They have lived there forever, since before the dinosaurs. (Olek)
>
> (God) is kind of like a person. He is a boy and has short hair…God helps the bad people not to be bad anymore and to be good. (Rosie)
>
> Fancon, is the great wizard that was born from a God…he helps me with smartness…and not being angry. (Tanner)
>
> (God) helps people…He helps anyone who wishes on a wishing star. Whatever they wish for, he makes it come true. (Emilee)
>
> God lives with Santa, Stone, Spiderman and Fairy in a big house in the sky…they live in a house made of vegetables. (Jayin)
>
> At night time, Santa comes to get me and we go to Disneyland to see Tinkerbelle, but only I can see her…she does this magic dance and gives me a magic tiara to put on. When I put it on, I'm happy again. (Kushi)

Several of the children expressed the long-term existence of their divine being, which they viewed to be omnipotent and omniscient. When asked about the first time he had met Fancon, Tanner explained that he had met Fancon "when (he) was in (his) mommy's tummy". So in Tanner's spirituality, Fancon existed at the origin of his own life and has been present in his life ever since. In Olek's spiritual understanding, his notion of "Big God", lived "far above the earth and controlled everything". Furthermore, Olek explained the origin and ever-present existence of his divine beings by stating "Big God has always been there. Forever and forever and forever…and the little Gods existed before the dinosaurs". In Olek's complex spirituality, his "Gods" have always existed and been present on the planet. This was also the case for Jayin, who described God, Santa, Fairy, Spiderman, and Stone as "very, very old" and "the most powerful in the whole world". Finally, in Emilee's understanding of God, she explained that he lives in the sky and is "a really old man" who has "long stretchy arms that can reach anywhere in the world he wants to". Emilee further explained that in addition to God's residence in the sky, he is also everywhere.

> Well, he is in the sky, but you can't see him because he hides…I don't know, he just hides. Maybe that's what he needs to do, just hide. Well, actually, he is invisible. He is everywhere, even in this house…he even lives in your mouth, but you can't see him. He just decides where he wants to be and he gets there.

For all of these children, their divine beings are present in their daily lives as well within the world around them in a way that is accessible and dependable to the children. However, their descriptions of ways in which the higher being(s) were accessible to them were unique across the children interviewed, generating several sub-themes. For example, the higher being(s) became present through conscious action from the child and appeared via a heard voice in the child's head or became present through toys or a valued object, or as an image. The various sub-themes related to how the divine being(s) manifested in the children's lives are described below.

Divinity Works through Mediums

For a few of the children, their higher being seemed to enter the child's world through highly valued objects or toys that were readily available to the children. Rosie, revealed that if she asked God for help when he was "busy", he would leave messages with her toy animals, Rainbow and Gray-ee, so they could help her when she came home from school. In Rosie's spirituality, Rainbow and Gray-ee not only had the ability to communicate with God, but often assisted him in helping her through times of difficulty: "When I am really sad, I talk to Rainbow. Rainbow helps me hear God better…they speak the same language". Similarly, with Emilee, God was accessible through wishes made on a "wishing star" that she could regularly look for outside of her bedroom window. She was also able to learn more about God through her toy babies or dolls, who "love God very much" and are "really with God". Finally, in Kushi's case, she was able to access Tinkerbelle's magic powers after she placed a "magic Tiara" on her head, which made her happy again.

Divinity Works through the Child

For all of the children, higher beings were accessed through their conscious action and received through sensory experiences including hearing a voice, seeing them appear, or feeling them in their body. Kushi explained how she would visit Disneyland at night so that she could have conversations with Tinkerbelle, who only she could "see". Jayin demonstrated that God and Santa would appear in his room after he would pray (sit on the floor, bending forward). When they came, they appeared only to Jayin who was also able to talk with them and touch them. Without prayer, Jayin explained, "they wouldn't come". Similarly, Olek described taking a "fancy express train", to meet and talk with many "little Gods" around the world. Through trips on this train, he was then able to have conversations with "Big God" who he could then "hear in his brain": "Big God is always in my brain. Anytime I have a question to ask him, his voice comes in my brain". In Rosie's interview, she also described talking to God and feeling his voice "all over (her) body and in (her) head". She further explained that God felt like "love" all over. Tanner also described a physical sensation of the divine and explained that Fancon, lived in his "imagination", which was located in his "heart and brain".

Invoking Divinity

Another key theme across all of the children's interview disclosures and play interactions was that they were able to access their divine beings when they needed to during times of stress and adversity. The children described several situations in which they were experiencing personal challenges and emotional difficulties and consciously called upon the divine for help. Olek explained how he calls upon God to help him feel better, to teach him things or simply as a friend who will listen: "Sometimes I ask the Big God for help and stuff…like to go on the monkey bars without falling and I did that once and I got all the way to the top without falling". In Rosie's interview, she revealed that she would speak to God when "bad things happen" to her. She described a situation in which she asked God for help after being scratched by the neighbour's dog. In this case, Rosie explained that she asked God to speak to the dog, and that he later told her that he did. In dealing with a bully at school, Rosie also turned to God for help.

> When Chelsea was going to hit me, I heard God in my head. He say, "No hitting, it's not nice". So, I tell Chelsea and she stopped…He knows everything. He even knows my whole family and everyone in the whole world.

During Tanner's interview, he described being able to call upon Fancon whenever he needed, which is often during school, for "smartness" because "Gods are really smart". Similarly, in Jayin's interview, he explained how his kneeling procedure (jiya) leads God to visit him at night when he can't sleep or awakens after a bad dream and is scared. This was also the case for Kushi who spoke to Tinkerbelle at night about times when she is sad or angry: "Sometimes I am mad at Christina at school and sometimes I am sad because my mommy doesn't play with me…so, I talk to Tinkerbelle lots at night time and she helps me". All of these children were successfully able to call upon their divine beings when they wanted help and support during times of difficulty to alleviate their feelings of stress and discomfort.

Spirituality through Relationship

A central theme emerging in relation to children's spirituality involved the children having very close personal attachments to the divine, nature and animals, as well as inanimate objects. In their descriptions, the children often described these relationships as intimate, sacred and often secretive. Sub-themes pertaining to the various aspects of relational spirituality are described below.

Relationship with the Divine.

When Kushi described her fantasy trips to Disneyland where she would visit Tinkerbelle and the princesses, she described dancing with them at the ball and living with them in their castle. To Kushi, her relationship with the princesses was special and a "secret" because it was only available to other princesses, like herself. This exclusive friendship that she developed was extremely valuable and important to Kushi and facilitated a sense of belonging and community. Jayin's relationship with God and Santa is also described as a very special one that only Jayin has access to or awareness of when he called upon them for a visit. He explained that these figures are invisible to his mother but could be accessed "if she calls them herself". When they do come to visit, Jayin describes their interactions as playful and fun: "They are so silly and funny that I laugh and then my owwie goes away".

Relationship with Nature

In Olek's interview, he expressed a sincere and special relationship with his pet snake and a deep respect for nature and animals. Olek spoke with sincere enthusiasm when he talked about his pet snake who he explained often talked with him. Olek described how he talks to his snake and that his snake mostly listens but also occasionally speaks to him "in his head" as a soft whisper, "like a normal snake". Nature and animals, in particular, were also an important part of Olek's spirituality and worldview. He explained how people originated from animals, and would return to animal form upon their death. This "cycle of life" exhibited a great reverence for nature and how the planet and animals sustained themselves over time.

> When an animal dies, it turns into energy. Like it keeps on going and going and going and going and never stops… their body gets eaten and eaten by worms and other bugs, it's called the food chain, and that's how energy travels from animal to animal. That's why I like nature and animals so much. And all of the animals when they are alive are pretty amazing too.

For Olek, his relationship with his snake and with nature was intricately tied to his sense of self and his spirituality.

> So when you die, your arms fall off and your legs become together and your head stretches and then you become a snake. And your spine bone stays in but it stretches and becomes long because it is the bone that protects us.

Olek's relationship with his own pet snake and his notion of turning into a snake upon death facilitated his understanding of God, creation, and death.

Relationship with Inanimate Objects

Rosie's relationship with her toys, particularly Rainbow and Gray-ee, demonstrated the importance and power of others in one's notion of spirituality. For Rosie, Rainbow and Gray-ee facilitated her connection to God, but also independently supported her through times of difficulty and stress. For example, Rosie explained that Gray-ee "stays with (her) when (she) is scared or sad and sometimes tells (her) funny things". Similarly, Rosie's Fairy can lend Rosie her magic wand so that Rosie is able to "fly away when she is sad". Even though Rosie acknowledged her toys as "pretend" she described her relationship with them as "real", suggesting a psychological animation of inanimate objects: "I love them because they love me…its real love. I feel it in my heart and sometimes in my brain". Rosie's relationships with her toys provided a sense of support and community that is tangible, present, and accessible during times of happiness and difficulty.

The Boundless Self

Another theme that emerged from the interviews is the children's notion of having spiritual or non-physical attributes, characteristics, or abilities. For example, some children spoke about or demonstrated the existence of a part of themselves that is not seen or that is beyond the physical. Similarly, some children described their existence as not being limited to the physical world and their present life. Some also had magical powers or abilities that crossed physical boundaries like flying, travelling far distances, and seeing things that others do not. The children's disclosures below highlight these views of the self:

> Everyone is a ghost-spirit before they are born. That means you are light and live in the sky and space. (Olek)
>
> Before I came into my mommy's tummy, I was very old but I was small like a baby. I lived in the clouds for a long time…it was nice. (Rosie)
>
> Spirit is the part of you that makes you alive. You are born with it. (Tanner)
>
> At night time, Santa comes to get me from my bedroom and we go to Disneyland to see Tinkerbelle, but only I can see her. (Kushi)
>
> I could see God, you know how? Cause I have lasers in my eyes. Yeah, but no one can see my lasers because they are secret. (Jayin)
>
> They are my babies…they only talk to very, very special people with glasses (she points to the glasses resting on her face). No one else, not even my sister, Sara, can hear them. (Emilee)

Having these non-physical attributes demonstrates the imaginative and fantastical nature of the children's spirituality with which they can creatively access and utilize an important resource of coping and strength.

Spiritual Infrastructure

A very powerful and unexpected theme emerging from this research was the multi-faceted and complex nature of children's conceptions of spirituality. Some of the children described very complex spiritual infrastructures that involved multiple divine figures that often served different functions and purposes. Interestingly, the children's disclosures were often dissimilar to the structure of divinity in their own religious teachings. For example, Olek, Emilee, Jayin and Tanner, who were all raised within monotheistic faiths, disclosed notions of spirituality containing multiple Gods and/or other sources of divinity.

Olek described a "Big God" who was ever present, lived above the Earth and who was ultimately responsible for controlling all things on the planet. However, he would do so by having regular "meetings" with various "little Gods" who were each in charge of separate geographic locations around the globe, usually countries. In Olek's disclosures he explained that these "little Gods" all had different names and homes, but were responsible for the welfare of the people in their respective locations.

> They are all different. The first God is called special, and the next one is called control, and the other one is called protector. They all have different names like that… They all look different and some are girls and some are boys, they are all different.

Emilee made a similar distinction between a "Big God" and "little God". In her spirituality, the "little God" is very old and can eventually die. It is the "Big God", who is also old but can't die, that "takes care of everyone in the whole sky…and finds a new God when the little God gets really old and dies". She further differentiates their roles and explained how each one helped her and others.

In Jayin's spirituality, he described five divine beings that lived in the sky and could be accessed for help and support when needed. Among these five, he described God to be the "leader" and explained that each had a different role and purpose: "They all have different powers, but God is the leader. They all listen to God…Spiderman can run the fastest and Stone looks like stone, so he's strong and Santa is nice and Fairy can fly". Although in Jayin's interview he accessed God most frequently for help directly, his construction of spirituality considered all five of these divine beings as powerful and supportive beings that could be accessed when needed, or who would assist God in helping Jayin with his challenges.

Through Tanner's sandtray, he created an elaborate world called Haikin with several figures that interconnected to construct a very complex view of spirituality. In Tanner's world, Fancon was born from Zeus, who was the creator of Earth. Tanner went on to describe several good and "mean" beings that lived in Haikin and influenced the development and fate of the individuals and "souls" in the world. Tanner's complex spirituality was not only inconsistent with his religious exposure but also from the scientific and practical worldview of his father's teachings.

Meaning-Making and Existentialism

Each child interviewed considered questions regarding certain existential matters such as their own identity, the origin of life, their birth, and their existence before birth. It is notable that the children not only considered these matters, but that all of them also had explanations and ways to understand these ideas that were unique, self-generated and not informed exclusively by any previous family, cultural, or religious teachings, as confirmed by each of their parents. Hence, another key theme related to children's spirituality focused on the use of their spirituality to make meaning of the world and their existence within it:

> When people die, they get buried and then the soil helps them turn into every kind of animal in the world…I will be a snake. (Olek)
>
> Before I was a baby, I lived inside an egg. I was very, very tiny so it wasn't that squishy. I liked it. I lived there with God and my mom. (Rosie)
>
> We all have three things that live in our hearts. Our soul, our spirit, and our imagination. Your soul is just another way to say life. (Tanner)
>
> Where were you before you were in your mommy's tummy? "I was with God, in the sky."(Emilee)

> I was born from my mommy's tummy… Do you know what I look like before? I was very old, but I was small like a baby. And, my name was Ash and now my name is Jayin. (Jayin)

What is interesting is the consistency in their abilities to construct a detailed, symbolic mythology to understand themselves, the world around them, and meaning about their life.

Spirituality and Positive Coping

A notable theme across the children's disclosures was their use of spirituality to cope with and adjust to various life experiences and events. All of the children interviewed described various ways in which they would use their spirituality to adapt to everyday life functioning as well as to understand the world around them. The importance and use of their views of spirituality varied across the children's disclosures and revealed common and unique functions of spirituality that could be activated in relation to immigration stressors as well as other daily life challenges.

All of the children disclosed views of spirituality that were positive and facilitated their coping and understanding of life events. For example, Olek's spirituality engendered an overall understanding of birth, life, death and creation. As well, his understanding of the role of Big God and little God included both personal and global management of issues related to food and shelter. Similarly, Kushi revealed how Tinkerbelle, the princesses and her fantasy trips to Disneyland supported her during times of anger and sadness.

In addition, all of the children's disclosures were detailed, elaborate and consistent across interview times. For example, Tanner and Olek were both able to explain the complex nature of their spirituality during two separate interview times and Tanner was able to re-create his entire sand-tray world without any hesitation or error or reminders from the interviewer. Also, many of the children were able to re-tell their spirituality constructs and correct purposeful errors made by the interviewer. For example, during our second interview when Rosie was asked if there was ever a time when God didn't come, she said, "No he always comes…remember, I told you?" Similarly, when meeting Jayin for the second time, I asked if Batman was one of the divine beings who lived in the sky and he frustratingly stated, "Remember, I told you last time, its Spiderman, Stone, God, Santa, and Fairy".

The stability and complexity of their belief systems is remarkable given their developmental age and stage and demonstrates the importance of spirituality in constructing their worldviews.

Some of the children also developed a remarkable sense of resiliency within their concepts of spirituality that was consciously accessed and utilized during times of difficulties as well as during times of health and feelings of happiness. These self-generated healing pathways were extremely powerful for the children whether they worked or not. I was impressed by the stability and resilience of their belief systems regardless of the outcome their actions produced. Rosie's statement elucidates the variable outcomes of their actions: "Yes, he is very nice. But sometimes he (God) is very busy… It sometimes happens to me a lot at school" (when being bullied). Regardless of these situations, the children's spirituality remained functional during times of perceived adversity through consistent rituals and actions that were consciously generated. As well, their beliefs and rituals were resilient to negative or undesirable outcomes. The various sub-themes that uncovered ways spirituality helps facilitate children's coping are described next.

Divine as Caretaker

For some of the children interviewed, the divine being within their view of spirituality served as a personal caretaker. Jayin described his five divine beings as sources of support that helped him during times of difficulty by making him laugh, teaching him things, and also protecting him from danger. "Sometimes God has to get angry and punch things for me…he punches whatever I am scared of". Jayin also disclosed how these divine beings took care of him prior to his earth life, when he "lived in the clouds with other old babies" until Jayin chose to come to earth and then "God, Santa, Stone, Spiderman and Fairy carried (him) to (his) mommy's tummy". The role of the divine beings as his caretakers from before birth demonstrates the strength and bond he has with these figures. This was also the case for Tanner who expressed meeting Fancon "a long time ago. Like when I was a baby, in my mommy's tummy". Rosie had a similar understanding of God throughout her life. She disclosed memories of being with God before he put her "inside (her) mommy's tummy". Reflecting on this time Rosie stated, "I liked it…He took care of me". She further explained how God is always available to her for help whenever she needs him.

Emotional Adjustment and Self-Change

Several of the children disclosed times when their spirituality supported their emotional adjustment or created change in how they felt or viewed matters in their own life. For Olek, God represented a being that he could go to for help, particularly when he couldn't solve matters on his own: "I go to Big God for help…he always helps…like a good friend. Sometimes he tells me what to do so that I can be happier". Tanner disclosed that he often talks to Fancon in "his head" and that Fancon helps him with "smartness and not being angry". Fancon does this, according to Tanner, because he is a God and Gods are smart. He also explained that Fancon helps him understand others around him. "In my dreams, Fancon tells me who I can trust". Using Fancon for both emotional support and to navigate relationships with others helps Tanner understand and heal himself, as well as establish a sense of security within the world around him. For Emilee, her notion of spirituality involved using a wishing star and her toy babies/dolls to access personal support, particularly at night when she had difficulty sleeping. She explained: "(God) helps people…He helps anyone who wishes on a wishing star. Whatever they wish for, he makes it come true". Using the wishing star gives Emilee a tangible way to access and call upon God for support. This ritual was an extremely powerful catalyst for growth and change, particularly during times of stress. While looking for a wishing star, making a wish, or listening to her dolls, Emilee was able to focus her attention on an action that would create a positive outcome, rather than on her fears and worries. This was also evident in Jayin's disclosures whose ritual of "jiya" called upon his five divine beings to aid him during times of fear and distress. When they would "appear" they would either help him solve the problem or play with him. In both situations, Jayin actively learned to utilize his spirituality to support emotional change and facilitate coping.

Transcendence of the Present Moment

For several of the children, their spirituality provided a way in which to transcend the difficulties and emotional challenges of the present moment. This often took place when their parents were not aware or likely to notice. Olek would often take imaginary trips on his "fancy express train" at night time to visit the homes of various "little Gods" because they are "nice". Olek further explained that he likes going by himself because "It's quieter like that". During these times, Olek stated that he would have fun visiting the homes and countries of the different Gods. These imaginary night trips would likely have facilitated his spirituality and understanding of differences among cultures that he would have experienced in his daily life in Canada.

Rosie also spoke about taking fantasy trips at night to China with her toy horse, Rainbow. By riding on Rainbow's back, Rosie was able to psychologically visit her family and spend time in a cultural context that was more familiar to her than that of her reality, where her English language skills presented challenges for social interaction. She also spoke about borrowing a magic wand from her toy Fairy princess to "do any magic (she) wants, like fly away when (she) is sad". This conscious transcendence during times of emotional difficulty is a source of extreme strength and resiliency for Rosie as it provides her with some control and breaks from her current adversities and life circumstances.

Tanner is able to transcend his life circumstances through his dreams. He makes the distinction between his "daytime dreams" and his "night time dreams", where he is able to believe in Gods. During these night time dreams, Tanner disclosed talking with Gods and learning about matters such as death that he may feel a need to reconcile with "factual" teachings of his daily life: "Well, in my real world, when people die, they just go to the grave and stay there. But in my dreams, they don't". Jayin also spoke about transcending the present moment through seeing images and meetings with God or other beings that were only visible to him.

> I saw (God) there (at IGA) by myself. No one else could see him there, just me. He looks like this (Jayin stands up and excitedly gestures the size and profile of God by extending his body from toes to arms demonstrating a very tall figure). He has a beard all around him (Jayin gestures around his own face), and his clothes, he has long clothes on and he also can see you.

Encounters and visions such as these were very special for Jayin and strengthened his bond with the divine being he mentioned as well as his own spiritual understandings. Although he did not necessarily have this experience during times of difficulty, he would ultimately return to these images when needed.

During Kushi's interview, she disclosed how her visits to Disneyland would often occur during times of emotional distress or difficulty. As was the case for a few of the other children, Kushi explained taking these journeys without the knowledge or awareness of others. She said: "I go (to Disneyland) in my head and at night time. I get to see all of the princesses. They live in the castle and when I go, I get to live in the castle too because then I am a princess too". During Kushi's visits to Disneyland, she is able to emotionally transform herself into a "princess", an image that she associates with happiness and beauty. As she takes these trips, she is able to transcend her current form and consequently any physical or emotional challenges associated with it (e.g., sadness, pain, discomfort, mistreatment, etc.).

Change of Others

Another common dimension across several of the children's views of spirituality included a desire to make the world a better place, often by healing others or by alleviating world problems. For Olek, "Big God" solved problems in the world, "like when people fight", with "his magic powers" by "helping people get happier". Olek also explained that "Big God" worked with the "little Gods" to ensure that global needs like food and shelter were met for the people. Similarly, Emilee revealed in her disclosures that God would be accessible to "bad" people as long as their intentions were good and they wished to be a better person.

> If a bad person wants to be a good person, then God would help them and make their wish into magic to come true. He hears all of the good wishes…he can't hear any of the bad wishes. His ears only work for the good ones because he has special ears.

Emilee further expanded on this notion when she revealed that her wish was for all of the bad people to go away so that "everything would be happy all over".

In Tanner's interview he explained that part of Fancon's role was to "help" and "protect all of the spirits" when bad things happen in Haikin.

> Fancon is always there to protect the people…But he gets mad when he can't keep everyone secure. He doesn't like anybody to die because you can't do anything without your spirit. Well, it's fun to have your spirit when you are alive.

Tanner also described the role of angels in Haikin as those who "help people from death". From his perspective, death was an undesirable outcome that Fancon and the angels were helping people prevent by protecting them from bad things happening, like having no imagination and becoming a "black soul".

As part of Rosie's disclosures we learn that she viewed God as someone that not only helped her directly during times of difficulty, but also helped those that were causing her pain (i.e., bullying her at school).

> He (God) talks to everyone in the heads, even bad people…God helps the bad people not to be bad anymore and to be good" I always talk to him when something bad happens…he says he's going to help the people that are hurting me.

Rosie's notion of helping others also transferred to animals. During her interview, she revealed a time that she was scratched by her neighbour's dog and she asked God to "talk to the dog", which in a later conversation, he confirmed doing. Rosie's utilization of God to help others who directly hurt her as well as those who are generally "bad people" facilitates her coping with existing challenges as well as protecting her from potential adversity from others that may occur in the future.

Conclusion

The children's interviews and play themes revealed complex and elaborate views of spirituality that the children were able to utilize to support themselves in understanding and adapting to several immigration challenges and stressors associated with their daily lives. Even though the children were unable to articulate these stressors directly, their disclosures demonstrated a desire to heal themselves, to protect themselves from further difficulties, and to alleviate external concerns that may indirectly impact the children today or in the future. The unique and common ways in which the children conceptualized and utilized spirituality in their lives also supports the individual and collective nature of adult notions of spirituality and the difference between spirituality and religiosity for the children interviewed. The next chapter will situate the children's life experiences and conceptions of spirituality within existing literature in this area.

Chapter 11

DISCUSSION

Immigration poses unique challenges for families and can be particularly difficult for very young children who are at critical stages in their developmental process (Thomas, 2000). Immigration can include stressors and challenges including separation from family members, changes in socioeconomic status, social isolation and experiences of racism or discrimination. For many young children, these difficulties may interrupt and negatively impact various areas of their overall functioning and development such as language acquisition, social adjustment and peer relations, emotional security, attachment to caregivers, and ethnic identity formation (Lago & Thompson, 1996; Thomas). Despite these challenges, children of immigrant families have not exhibited higher levels of maladjustment or psychological distress than other Canadian children their age (Health Canada, 1999). Along with family motivation and ethnic community support, spirituality has been posited as one of the factors supporting post-migration resilience (Hill et al., 2000; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Richards & Bergin, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2003).

Despite the reported protective benefit of spirituality in the lives of immigrant families, very little is understood about how children themselves conceptualize and utilize spirituality in their lives (Mabe & Josephson, 2004; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Piechowski, 2001). Therefore, the intention of the present study was to explore spirituality among young children of immigrants adjusting to adverse life events from their own perspective. The guiding research questions were: (a) How do children of immigrant families conceptualize and understand spirituality in their lives? (b) What is/are their experience(s) of spirituality? (c) What role does spirituality play in their attempt to understand, adjust to and respond to life challenges in their lives?

This chapter will discuss immigration-related concerns in the lives of the children in this study, their conceptions of spirituality, and how these conceptions were utilized in their continual adjustment and adaptation process. The children's experiences of spirituality will be evaluated in relation to the literature on children's nature, capacity, and the functions of spirituality. The implications of the research for assessment and intervention with immigrant children experiencing various life challenges will subsequently be presented. This discussion chapter concludes with the disclosure of the researcher's experiences studying immigrant children's spirituality and outlines directions for future research.

Immigration Challenges

The children and parents involved in this study appeared to be affected by a variety of immigration-related challenges. Parents shared a number of the difficulties they perceived to be impacting their families as well as those specifically affecting their children. Through the children's play and interview disclosures additional immigration stressors were also revealed. The immigration challenges that were disclosed by parents and children are presented separately and discussed in the context of current literature in the following sections.

Parental Perspectives

A number of parents discussed a change in family socioeconomic status upon migration as a potent stressor currently affecting their families. The changes they described were related to difficulties entering the Canadian employment market as well as the lack of recognition of their foreign educational credentials and pre-migration employment histories. None of the parents interviewed were able to find comparable employment opportunities as those that were available to them in their home countries. Therefore, a number engaged in academic upgrading or training in order to re-enter professions with similar status as their pre-migration occupations and to rebuild financial security for their families. For many others, as is commonly the case for many immigrants, these financial challenges forced the acceptance of employment in positions that are comparably far inferior in status and income, which is termed downward mobility (Reitz, 2001).

Reitz (2001) completed a seminal analysis of national census data on immigrant employment trends over the 25 year period from 1970 to 1995. In his analysis, Reitz (2001) revealed a downward trend in immigrant employment status and earnings over time. These results suggest that barriers to immigrant employment are increasing regardless of pre-migration employment status or post-migration educational training. Therefore, immigrants generally do not benefit from having received higher educational training in the same capacity as Canadian born and trained individuals. According to Reitz, this disadvantage is further exacerbated by the increasing level of education of native-born Canadians with whom immigrants compete for employment positions. This increasing downward mobility trend can have a significant negative impact on immigrant families' psychological health and settlement (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Beiser et al., 1998; Westwood & Ishiyama, 1991).

The Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees (Beiser et al., 1998) identified specific factors that affect the mental health of immigrants and refugees. The task force recognized the significant negative impact that downward mobility has on the family relationship and structure as well as on the development and health of immigrant children. For example, given the limited lucrative employment opportunities for immigrants, many families are forced to have multiple members employed in order to have basic needs met. This may include both parents and older children, which can disrupt the family hierarchy and hinder parents attending to the needs of younger children in the family, as was the case for Kushi's mother for example (Beiser et al.).

An additional concern regarding downward mobility is the resulting change in family social class, which can be particularly difficult for those individuals who come from countries with strict social class distinctions. Upon immigration, individuals may prefer to maintain contact with others of the same social class, but do not have the means or opportunity as a result of their place and status of employment (Beiser et al.; Reitz, 2001). Also, according to Reitz, a family can be impacted by their change in social status for a number of years, creating further financial and emotional stress in the family.

The parents interviewed were also challenged by their separation from family members as a consequence of the migration process. Two parents interviewed indicated the initial separation of their spouse to be a difficult transition for the family. This break in the family system can be stressful for the spouse who remains in the home country and often results in feelings of resentment and frustration, particularly when the decision to migrate is not collectively made or is based on idealistic wishes for a better life (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). For almost all of the parents interviewed, their immigration created a separation from extended family members who often remained in the country of origin. As Sue and Sue (2003) explain, this can result in feelings of sadness and loneliness after the initial period of settlement has occurred and basic needs are met. At this time, families may feel a sense of loss and concern that can often be exacerbated when elderly family members who are distant become ill or are in living in unstable or challenging life circumstances (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002).

Similarly, the parents interviewed also expressed feelings of sadness and remorse regarding the limited extended family relationships that are available to their children. This may be of particular concern when the children's view of their family system gradually evolves to no longer include extended family members that are still important to their parents (Partida, 1996). Feelings of sadness and remorse related to the separation of family members can often remain for the duration of time in the new country, particularly when their previous life is remembered as ideal and there is a longing to return (Abu Baker, 1999).

Another challenge raised by many of the parents was the development of cultural and ethnic identity for themselves as well as for their children. In particular, parents expressed worry about their children's adjustment to both Canadian culture and that of their country of origin. Most immigrants who arrive to Canada make attempts to belong to the Canadian culture while attempting to integrate their unique cultural heritage with Canadian ways (Berry, 2003). This can often result in the formation of a bicultural identity, which is common for immigrants living in two different cultural traditions but can also be a challenging process for very young children, particularly those born in the host country who have multiple adult cultural models and ideals to make sense of.

A related issue to ethnic identity development raised by many of the parents interviewed was the acquisition of English as a second language for themselves as well as for their children. Some parents shared that their perceived linguistic limitations were hindering the development peer relationships for both themselves and for their children, which for many immigrants can impede successful integration (Arthur & Merali, 2004). An additional concern raised was regarding their limited confidence in the use of English, particularly related to their accents. Dion, Dion, and Pak (1990) reveal that the confidence of new immigrants to speak the dominant language is strongly related to their psychosocial and cultural adaptation and can hinder their successful social and emotional integration. This can be particularly difficult for young children whose daily school functioning and social interactions are dependant on the use of their new second language.

For immigrants, an additional concern regarding the acquisition of a second language is the emphasis also placed on the maintenance of their first language. While having both languages often supports the acculturation process and the establishment of a positive bicultural identity, it can be particularly challenging for young children. In their case, learning the new host language often takes precedence over preserving the original language in order to survive in the host culture (Baptiste, 1993). For school aged children in particular, the acquisition of the host language is critical to academic and social success and is strongly encouraged and supported by school staff. This can be extremely confusing and challenging for young children, particularly for those whose parents prefer them to maintain the first language at home and are discouraged from speaking their second language outside of school (Sue & Sue, 2003).

Child Perspectives

Through interview disclosures and play interactions, the children shared being impacted by the challenges their parents mentioned above including family socioeconomic concerns, separation from extended family members, social isolation, cultural identity concerns, and difficulties with first and second language use and acquisition. However, interviews with the children revealed that they were impacted by these stressors in ways that were not predicted or perceived by their parents including difficulties sleeping and emotional challenges including feelings of sadness and anger. In addition, the children identified further immigration stressors that were not addressed by their parents.

Some of the children interviewed revealed an awareness of their parents' socioeconomic challenges and educational upgrading by indicating how these family life challenges were impacting them directly. For example, children indicated an awareness of their parent's limited availability, the importance of having basic needs met, and wanting to have similar toys and games as their peers. These developmentally appropriate challenges expressed by the children demonstrate the impact associated with family socioeconomic status and downward mobility on successful development and psychological health of young children in the family system. These concerns were identified by the *Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugee* as discussed in Beiser et al. (1998) as areas of concern for immigrant children and youth. Moreover, given that socioeconomic challenges continue over many years (Reitz, 2001), there may be additional considerations for the children as they age including a need to enter the workforce which may result in feelings of resentment towards caregivers and alterations to family structure (Sue & Sue, 2003).

Other children interviewed disclosed the importance of cultural ties and first language interactions in their feelings of security and cultural belonging. Developing a sense of belonging and safety is critical to early child development (Thomas, 2000) and can be compromised through immigration, particularly when two cultural models are presented in their daily lives (Sue & Sue, 2003). For many young children of immigrants, developing a sense of belonging within their culture of origin and within the host culture is a challenging and not always successful process (Berry, 2003). Successful cultural integration and the development of a bicultural ethnic identity supports one's overall functioning, particularly when one's cultural group can be a significant resource for support and positive coping (McGoldrick & Giordano, 1996; Sue & Sue). When cultural belonging and ethnic identification is not achieved, young children can feel a sense of social isolation and may even face issues of bullying and peer conflicts (Sue & Sue), which was the case for some of the children interviewed. This added concern presents an ongoing challenge for children if unresolved, particularly as they progress through the school system and the importance of positive peer relationships increases (Thomas, 2000).

The intricate spiritual lives of the immigrant children who participated in this study seemed to provide them with both a solid foundation for managing various life challenges they were facing and for temporarily escaping from life difficulties. In the sections below, emerging findings related to the children's spirituality are discussed in the context of existing research on the nature of spirituality, children's spiritual capacity and the functions of spirituality in relation to adapting to immigration and non-immigration related life experiences.

Conceptions of Spirituality

At present, no uniform definition of spirituality exists across or within disciplines, despite the resurgence of popular interest and scientific inquiry in spirituality (Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Richards & Bergin, 2000). Some authors posit, particularly with regards to children, that a uniform definition of spirituality would deny the inherent complexity and diversity of this concept (Nye, 1999; Pargament, 1999). Consequently, researchers have proposed that spirituality is best conceptualized as being unique in expression and definition to each knower (Hill et al., 2000; Miller & Thoresen; Nye; Pargament; Richards & Bergin). Furthermore, this unique expression is understood to be intrinsically tied to one's worldview, which in part is influenced by one's environmental and cultural experiences (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999). This perspective was clearly demonstrated across the children's interview disclosures and play interactions in the various ways in which each child conceptualized and generated unique notions of spirituality. Additionally, the children constructed notions of spirituality that aligned with concepts, objects and figures available in their day to day life as well as home and host cultural experiences. This demonstrates the influence of their worldview in the formation of their spiritual concepts as well as the influence of their spiritual concepts in the construction of their worldview. Hence, the importance of regarding spirituality as "unique to the knower" was clearly demonstrated among the children interviewed. The children in the study each identified unique divine beings that existed in their lives and shared how these beings were an important part of their daily lives and functioning. The children also attributed unique characteristics, powers, roles and responsibilities to these divine beings that were self-generated and not necessarily consistent with their religious teachings and upbringings. Some children had multiple divine beings that had different ethnicities (e.g., a Polish God), and others had divine beings with specific roles (e.g., leader and protector) or characteristics (e.g., smart, strong, kind, and helpful). However, across these unique notions, several common dimensions highlighted in the spirituality literature also emerged.

Commonalities among the children's views of spirituality include the relationality of spirituality, feelings acts and experiences of spirituality, the distinction between spirituality and religiosity, and the use of spiritual concepts to make sense of the world and one's existence (Hill et al., 2000; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Nye; Pargament; Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Benson, 2006). Children's disclosures also offered unique contributions to our current understanding of children's conceptions of spirituality, which are further explored in the sections to follow.

Relationality

Spirituality is generally understood as a relational construct. Currently, the literature explains these relationships to be with oneself, with others, with nature, or with the perceived divine or transcendent (Hay & Nye, 1998; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Pargament, 1999). Nye and Hay's (1996) concept of "*relational consciousness*" expands this notion in children and attests to their natural process of relating to the world and all things they consider to be part of the world, including whatever they may consider as divine (Nye & Hay). Across interview disclosures and play interactions, each child expressed an intimate and special connection through one or more of these types of relationships and demonstrated alignment with specific aspects of Nye and Hay's concept of relational consciousness. In particular, the children demonstrated the importance of their relationships with various divine beings and with nature. The children also expressed relationships with inanimate objects and toys, fictional main-stream cultural characters perceived as divine, and with created settings, lands, and worlds that extended beyond the visible and conventional adult-known reality. These latter relationships are consistent with Nye and Hay's notion of "all things" that children consider as part of their world.

In this way, the children interviewed are demonstrating the complexity with which they construct their world as well as demonstrating that the components of their world consist of both the real *and* the imagined. The intimacy and importance of these self-generated relationships however, have not been explored or documented by Nye and Hay (1996) or any other authors to date. Furthermore, the children's demonstrated ability for genuine connections with inanimate toys and objects as well as their integration of cultural and fictional characters has not been explored as part of Nye and Hay's concept of relational consciousness. Thus, these relationships disclosed by the children expand our current understanding of spiritual relationality to include additional ways in which children construct and define their spirituality and also demonstrates the importance of the variety of relationships that children generate from what is available in their world or what relationship possibilities that their minds can create for them.

In addition, the children's relationships with both inanimate objects and constructed "imaginary" characters and worlds were critical to their spiritual concepts and their ability to access and utilize their spirituality, which is also worthy of further exploration and research as this has also not been documented to date. Another important consideration is that the creativity and uniqueness of the children's self-generated spirituality seemed to be known to them as expressed by their desire to keep their conceptions private and secretive. This is consistent with Piechowski's (2001) claim that children realize that adults around them are "spiritually ignorant" and therefore tend not to share their spirituality with parents. When reviewing their children's interview transcripts, the participating parents were surprised and intrigued by their children's spiritual notions, which they were often not fully aware of. Therefore, further exploration of the children's purpose for privacy would be warranted; for example, did their privacy enhance a sense of sacredness or did it suggest the children's awareness that their conceptions are unique and perhaps unconventional.

Feelings, Acts, and Experiences

The definition of spirituality has also been demonstrated to encompass feelings, acts and experiences (Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Pargament, 1999; Piechowski, 2001; Richards & Bergin, 2000). For all of the children interviewed, sharing and discussing their spirituality elicited strong feelings of happiness, excitement, and contentment; as well, the children reported positive emotional associations with their spirituality. Furthermore, the children demonstrated acts related to their spirituality such as ways in which to invoke the divine, have conversations with the divine, and access support and help from the divine when needed. Some children were able to invoke the divine in their lives through actions such as kneeling or talking, while others were able to access God through their toys, play objects, or self-generated acts such as looking for "wishing stars" or taking "fancy express trains". These actions on the part of the children are consistent with Piechowski's conclusion that children discover methods of achieving their own state of heightened consciousness and spirituality through spontaneous or self-created techniques. Finally, the children also revealed having distinct experiences, such as the sensation of a boundless self, related to their rituals and encounters that were reported over time and circumstances, which is also consistent with the literature in children's spirituality (Hart, 2003; Hay and Nye, 1998; Piechowski).

Hay and Nye's (1998) concept of "relational consciousness" specifically explains that children's spirituality can be expressed as unexplained levels of sensory awareness or consciousness. The children in this study revealed heightened sensory awareness and experiences such as transcending the present moment, hearing or seeing things that others could not, and memories or recollections of pre-birth experiences. These specific sensory experiences align with Nye and Hay's (1996) categories of spiritual sensitivity such as "awareness sensing", which includes a child's ability to be in the here and now and become transfixed by the present moment, and "mystery sensing", which involves a deep fascination with a given experience and the ability to imagine that which is beyond the known or the obvious. Similarly, Piechowski (2001) and Hart (2003) have documented the existence of spiritual experiences in young children who also exhibit heightened awareness similar to that explained by Nye and Hay's "awareness sensing" and "mystery sensing". For example, Hart described the recollection of a Native elder when he was a boy of age five, who experienced a "visit" from his deceased tribe elders for the purpose of "teaching" him. This vision is not unlike the spiritual experiences described by the children in this study who revealed "visits" from divine beings in times of need.

The children's heightened sensory awareness, particularly their recollections of pre-birth experiences, also aligns with the perspective offered by Ruiz (1997) who theorizes that children are born with complete awareness of themselves, their spiritual origin and their oneness with all life. He further posits that this awareness is easily accessible to children, unlike adults who become conditioned to the normative views of spirituality perpetuated by society over time. With age, Ruiz explains that children's views of spirituality are less imaginative and creative as they begin to align with the normative opinions and stories of their dominant culture and religious teachings. Given that many such spiritual experiences in adults are sanctioned notions of reality across cultures (Miller & Thoresen, 2003), it would be interesting to research whether nurturing and validating these children's early notions of spirituality would enable their own spiritual feelings, acts and experiences to persist over time.

Religiosity and Spirituality

A distinction is made in the literature between children's concepts of religiosity and spirituality. Miller and Thoresen (2003) suggest that one's sense of relationality, feelings, acts and experiences can but do not necessarily draw on religious imagery, doctrine, symbols, or traditions. Fukuyama and Sevig (1999) further clarify that spirituality is recognized as a broader construct than religion and is unique but not necessary distinct from religiosity. In the children's revealed spirituality, their familial, cultural, and in particular their religious teachings, did not necessarily form the basis of their conceptualizations. Instead, as suggested by Fukuyama and Sevig (1999), the children's views of spirituality were constructed with and informed by the cultural symbols available from their own experiences, including Western cultural symbols such as God, Santa and Tinkerbelle as well as symbols self-generated or imagined, such as wishing stars, Fancon and Big God. For the children, these images and symbols took on unique meanings that were integral to their notions of spirituality. The most compelling evidence that children's spirituality was not confined by their religion was that a number of the children in this study who were raised in monotheistic faiths shared their beliefs about spiritual concepts and infrastructures involving multiple divine figures with various functions and roles.

The self-constructed spirituality that the children described in this study, rather than religiosity is consistent with what would be expected from children in Fowler's (1981) stage of *Intuitive/Projective Faith*. Fowler explains that during this stage of faith development, there is a rise of imagination in children, where their minds are creative and open to all possibilities of religion and faith-based explanations of life, death, and creation. However, despite being exposed to religious teachings, the children in this study did not accept aspects of their religious teachings as possibilities, but rather created their own views, beliefs, and rituals. This tendency for children to create their own notions of spirituality is explained in research exploring children's spiritual's development.

In a recent chapter, Hay, Reich, and Utsch (2006) explain the importance of understanding spiritual development in children as a different process from religious development that is genuine, innate, and unique. The authors argue that children do not align with early explanations of religious teachings because many religions do not provide specific explanations or coping strategies for dealing with the experiences of young children.

Another important distinction between spiritual and religious development in children is with regards to Fowler's (1981) notion that children's young views, although imaginative, are underdeveloped or immature. Hay, Reich, and Utsch (2006) explain that spirituality, unlike religiosity, is *not* an acquired process of development leading to the eventual acquisition of higher order functioning. Rather, the authors suggest that spirituality is an innate and accessible aspect of human nature at any age that can transform, understand, guide, and direct one's life choices and experiences.

The children's distinction between their religious teachings and their own constructed spirituality is inconsistent with other researchers who have suggested that children do not make distinctions between their taught religiosity and their self-created spirituality (Barnes et al., 2000).

Coles (1990) also argues that spirituality in children is best understood within the context of their religious teachings. Although the children's religious affiliations and cultural contexts were critical in framing an understanding of their spirituality, they could not exclusively explain the source of their spirituality. For example, some children raised in monotheistic faiths revealed complex spiritual infrastructures with multiple divine beings and that may not be recognized aspects of divinity in any other faiths but their own self-generated ones. Similarly, others had concepts of the divine that did not include those identified in their religious frameworks that each served a different role and function.

Spirituality as Meaning-Making

Across the children interviewed, each created a notion of spirituality that included a framework to understand themselves and the world around them. Hay, Reich, and Utsch (2006) explain that religious teachings do not include developmentally appropriate existential explanations for "where we come from", "where will we go" and "who we are". Thus, children will often create individual perspectives and interpretations to answer these questions within their notions of spirituality in order to help them cope with and understand their current life experiences.

Pargament (1999) also recognizes children's spirituality as a search for significance or meaning in their lives as well as a search for the sacred or divine. Hay (1997) further describes children's spirituality as an innate potential to be much more deeply aware of themselves and everything that is not themselves as a way to understand their own existence. This view is also consistent with other researchers who define spirituality as an "unconscious longing for insight into our existence and for wholeness" (Ploeger, 1997, p.16) and an overarching framework that orients individuals to the world and provides meaning, direction and motivation for one's life (McIntosh, 1995; Pargament, 1997). In this way, children's self-constructed conceptions of spirituality inform their own life-narrative and support sense-making of and ways of coping with life challenges.

Spiritual Capacity

As discussed above, research in children's spirituality has documented children's capacity for genuine spiritual experiences as well as the construction of complex and meaningful concepts of spirituality, although the capacity for very young children to experience it has been questioned. It is important then to further understand and explore the revealed spirituality of the children of four to six years in this study from a developmental perspective.

Cognitively, according to Piaget's (1952) stages of development, all of the children interviewed were in the *pre-operational* stage of thinking. At this stage, Piaget explains that children start to understand their environment through symbols that represent objects, as is the case in language development. Furthermore, this symbolic association is acquired through concrete evidence and personal experiences, rather than abstract logic and thinking. From this perspective, we can understand why the children expressed and experienced their spirituality through the use of symbols actually available in their lived realities and experiences. For example, many of the children established their spiritual relationships with objects available in their immediate life (e.g., snakes, dolls, superheroes, and toys) or generated from their lived, albeit imagined, experiences (e.g., Fancon, Santa and Tinkerbelle).

Furthermore, from Piaget's perspective (1952), children at this stage rely on lived, personal experiences with things *external to themselves* as a basis for meaning-making. So then one might wonder how the children were able to express meaningful complex, detailed, and consistent experiences and relationships with concepts and symbols that could not be externally experienced or seen, at least by others. Perhaps, as the children articulated in their interviews, their spirituality consists of real, lived experiences. When describing abstract beings and worlds as "memories", perhaps the children are seeing and experiencing realities that are concrete for them and that from their perspective, their imaginations manifest a unique sense of reality. From this view, their experiences are concrete; they are not abstractions of their thinking, but rather authentic sensory experiences. For each child, what they experienced (e.g., talking to other beings and travelling to other worlds) have all happened on some level, likely sensory. Even though for some children, this can be separated from other forms of three-dimensional reality, "it is not like how I hear you, it is in my head", it is nevertheless a "real" experience.

This notion of real sensory experiences is supported by Nye and Hay's (1996) concept of "mystery sensing" where children's imaginations create opportunities to conceive that which is not seen or obvious to others. Hay and Nye (1998) further argue that abstract reasoning makes it difficult for adults to readily access the spiritual experiences and awareness capable in childhood. Similarly, in a review of the literature in children's spirituality, Piechowski (2001) explains that children are able to genuinely experience realities that are beyond form or limits known to adults because they are naturally in the "here and now" and have heightened sensory experiences. Gopnik, Meltzoff and Kohl (1999) further report that children's perceptual skills allow them to be more observant, aware and actively engaged in the world around them as compared to adults.

This notion is further validated by Newberg and Newberg's (2006) neurological research in children's spirituality. These authors suggest that children experience an overproduction of neurons and neural connectedness during early childhood, which explains the power of their fantastical and imaginative thinking. Specifically, because their brain is still in the process of establishing neural pathways, areas of the brain are not as solidified as with adults. Thus, regions of the brain not typically related or connected in adulthood, may be in children. This expansion of neural communication in childhood creates authentic sensations and realities not available to adults. According to Newberg and Newberg, during this unique time of neurological development children experience a natural interconnectedness with all thoughts, experiences, and sensations. Hence, children are likely concretely experiencing their spirituality as they describe: through actual encounters, relationships, and sensations. This view may also explain why the children's revealed spirituality minimized the use of logic and instead utilized fantastical imagery and experiences.

Fowler (1981), in his faith development model, and Piaget (1952) purport that young children's cognitive egocentrism makes it difficult for them to take the perspective of others or differentiate their perspectives from those of others. The present findings are not entirely consistent with this view of cognitive development. Specifically, the children were often able to take on the perspective of others, particularly those with whom they had developed special relationships.

Furthermore, some of the children expressed empathy and concern for these beings and for others on the planet (e.g., mean or bad people needing God's help more). This exhibited empathy was also noted in Coles' (1990) research in children's spirituality where he documented young children's surprising sense of morality and humanitarianism.

Another important distinction with regards to children's spiritual capacity is noted by Fowler and Dell (2004) who explain faith as a developmental process, where children at this first stage of development are less advanced than adults. From the perspective of spiritual development theories however and as evidenced in the children interviewed in this study, spirituality is not necessarily an acquired process (Hay, Reich, & Utsch 2006). Instead, spirituality in children may be better understood as a genuine way to understand the world around them and their own existence with the flexibility of self-generated meaning-making. This perspective is echoed by Hay and Nye (1998) who explain that spirituality in children is "an intentional and natural process of relating to the world" and Levine (1999) who suggests that children's spirituality reflects unique and individual experiences that are not necessarily uniform across children and are not dependent on their developmental stage.

From this view, perhaps the suggestion made by Dr. Goa, a theology professor at the University of Alberta (personal communication, November 2, 2002), that Maslow's hierarchy of needs be inverted is accurate. Specifically, Goa explains that Maslow's hierarchy suggesting that an individual's basic needs must be met before spiritual needs are considered should in fact be inverted to demonstrate the power of the individual's capacity to create notions of spirituality which then can assist an individual with all other tasks of human development and functioning. Goa further posits that perhaps true human life does not exist until an individual experiences connectedness and relationship with another, be it divine or otherwise. This idea that there is an innate drive to create a sense of oneself within the world and to make meaning of the world is further echoed by Newberg and Newberg (2006) who suggest that there is an evolutionarily supported neurological drive to understand the world and ourselves.

Functions of Spirituality

The children developed unique pathways for resiliency within their concepts of spirituality that were consciously accessed during times of difficulty as well as during times of health and feelings of happiness. These self-generated healing pathways were extremely powerful for the children and played an important role in their day to day adjustment to various immigrant and non-immigrant related challenges evident in their lives. The children revealed functions of spirituality that are consistent with current literature and also offer several opportunities to expand known functions of children's spirituality.

Thus far, most epidemiological and clinical studies investigating the relationship between spirituality and health outcomes have demonstrated a positive influence of spirituality in the context of medical illnesses (Barnes et al., 2000; Koenig & Larson, 2001; Ray, 2004; Sexon, 2004; Stern, Canda & Doershuk, 1992). However, very little research has been conducted to examine children's spirituality in adjusting to non-medical life challenges (Frangoulls, Jordan, & Lansdown, 1996; Stuber & Houskamp, 2003). Ray (2004) further investigated the influence of the mind on the body and concluded that our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs initiate neurochemical and immunological activity that directly defends our body against illness or act as catalysts to negative health outcomes. Although this research can be extrapolated to mental health, very little is specifically understood about the influence of spirituality for individuals facing mental health or psychological challenges. Furthermore, very little is currently available and known about the functions of spirituality in the lives of children.

The functions of spirituality revealed in the children's interviews and play interaction offers new insights into how immigrant children utilize their notions of spirituality to cope with and understand their current immigrant-related life challenges. For example, one child attributed the resolution of immigrant-related financial challenges to God who works to provide food and shelter for the people and keeps prices for toys low. Other children utilized their spirituality to transcend present difficulties such as limited social interaction due to developing English language skills and missing extended family members by taking imaginary trips, invoking the help or presence of divine beings, or sensory experiences (e.g., talking in their head) to ask for help, guidance, and support. Children's ability to transcend the present situation and feel a sense of connection and unity beyond the self (Nye & Hay, 1996) facilitates their ability to psychologically remove themselves from the impact of life challenges and consequently reduces the likelihood of developing mental health problems. Furthermore, children's expressed views of omnipotent divine beings may have increased their sense of hope in the face of adversity and further solidified the utilization of their self-constructed beliefs. Although children's ability to generate a notion of a higher being that serves as a caretaker has been documented in previous research, the specific use and function of this belief has not been explored (Nye & Hay, 1998; Piechowski, 2001; Scott, 2003; Sexon, 2004).

Other children in this study utilized their spirituality to cope with feelings of sadness and anger, or to increase feelings of happiness and comfort related to day to day struggles such as difficulties sleeping, peer bullying, and academic challenges. This is similar to related research in which Barnes et al. (2000) documented children's use of spiritual beliefs to cope with night-time fears, hospitalization, and medical diagnoses. Unique to the present research is how the children utilized their notions of spirituality to cope with their perceived challenges. Specifically, the children utilized important connections and relationships with divine beings as well as with tangible, available toys (e.g., dolls, horse), objects (e.g., snake) or images (e.g., wishing star). All of these functions of spirituality were generated by the children themselves and supported positive coping and sense-making of life challenges. These functions were also remarkably consistent over time and resilient to coping attempts that may not have generated immediate alleviation of life stressors.

The function and utilization of children's unique, self-generated notions of spirituality illuminate a natural healing pathway for psychological and emotional distress that has not been documented and therefore not utilized to date. In a recent review of the health benefits of spirituality, Powell, Shahabi, and Thoresen (2003) suggest that those individuals who access internal spiritual resources in times of stress and difficulty are able to cope and manage their adverse life events better than people who do not have access to such spiritual resources. Thus, the validation of these natural child-generated pathways for coping offers a novel direction for future mental health research as well as the expansion of current research documenting the possible functions of children's spirituality.

Implications

The intention of the present research was to address significant limitations in our current understanding of children's spirituality; specifically, this study aimed to understand how children of immigrant families conceptualize, experience, and utilize spirituality in their daily lives and during times of difficulty. To date, no research has been conducted to answer these specific questions with children of immigrants (Mabe & Josephson, 2004; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Richards & Bergin, 2000) and very little is generally known about how children conceptualize and understand spirituality from their own perspective (Coles, 1990; Hart, 2003; Hay & Nye, 1996; Piechowski, 2001). Research in the area of children's spirituality has instead focused on reporting the isolated spiritual experiences of children or has relied on retrospective reports from adults and parents' reports of their children's experiences (Harrison, 2000; Hart; Piechowski). Although these perspectives inform our understanding of children's capacity for spirituality, they do not necessarily inform how children experience or utilize their spirituality, which would enlighten mental health practice. This is of particular importance when facilitating immigrant children's adjustment to life challenges where spirituality is a known resource for strength and resilience (Health Canada, 1999).

By asking children directly about their own spirituality and how it relates to their life experiences and adjustment to life challenges, this study provides important considerations for how children view themselves, the world around them and their own coping and healing attempts. This understanding helps establish a sense of children's personally constructed worldviews beyond those expressed by their parents or recalled as adults. This is of particular importance in establishing sound and competent cross-cultural care for children seeking mental health services. Richards and Bergin (2000) for example, emphasize that religious and spiritual diversity among individuals seeking mental health support is inevitable and that the application and knowledge of these areas are essential to credible and ethical practice. Specifically, it is important to understand and validate how children create, access and utilize their spirituality in relation to mental health and coping so that psychologists are better equipped when working with children of immigrants facing or perceiving life challenges.

Based on the way in which this study was conducted and emerging research findings, several recommendations for assessment of children's spirituality and intervention when facing life adversity can be proposed.

Assessment of Children's Spirituality

This section offers important areas of consideration for how psychologists and other mental health care professionals working with young children can access children's concepts of spirituality and understand the role their spirituality plays in their healing and coping attempts. These considerations for assessing children's spirituality are also meant to provide insight into ways of interacting with children that are developmentally appropriate while maintaining sensitivity to the nature and meaning of spirituality for children. In addition to the following information, it is recommended that the actual interviews presented in this document also inform the assessment process.

Relationship. The quality of the relationship created between the child and the psychologist, as with any therapeutic intervention, is extremely important (Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 1999). Given that all of the children interviewed considered their spirituality private and sacred, the relationship, particularly trust and genuineness, must be established. The authenticity of this relationship will support the child's acceptance of the invitation to share their spirituality with the assessor. The comfort level of the child to reveal their spirituality will also further expand as this relationship continues to develop over time.

Initially, it is recommended that the psychologist or mental health worker engage with one or both of the child's parents. As with most initial clinical interviews, this initial interaction with the parents serves two purposes: (a) to learn more about the family and the child by assessing the child's developmental history, current life challenges, and cultural and spiritual background, and (b) to increase the child's trust and acceptance of the assessor/mental health worker through a relationship with their caregiver and by expressing genuine regard for the entire family. To encourage this last purpose, after engaging the parents, it is recommended that the psychologist have the parents introduce him/her to the child to further increase trust and acceptance.

Upon first meting the child, it is important to spend time simply being with and engaging the child. Developmentally appropriate conversation, activities or standard play can be used to further establish trust and rapport. During this time, it is also important that a concerted effort is made to emotionally connect with the child and genuinely enter his/her world by demonstrating interest and responding to his/her views with respect and curiosity. It may also be of value to follow the child's lead and allow him/her to become engaged in conversation about the child's own interests and ideas that day.

After a genuine emotional connection and trusting relationships has been established, the psychologist can invite a discussion of spirituality and spirituality themes that emerge naturally from the child's play environment and disclosures. For example, when in a trusting relationship, young children will often disclose through talk or play interactions some emotional distress or personal conflict. If this occurs through symbolic play with dolls or figures, for example, then inviting spiritual topics (e.g., coping) for the child indirectly by speaking directly with their identified symbolic figure (e.g., doll, toy, figure, puppet, etc.) may be an effective way to elicit spiritual conversations. In this way, similar to most play therapy models (Axline, 1947; Oaklander, 1988), children are able to reveal their inner worlds in a way that is made concrete for them as well as for the observer.

Setting. It is also important to consider the location and setting of the interviews with the children in assessing children's spirituality. For all of the children interviewed, whether in the home or in the university clinic playroom, the physical space provided was critical for many reasons: (a) it created a sense of a special time and space for the assessment process marked by entering and exiting the room, (b) it provided a safe and comfortable surrounding for the children, which facilitated trust in the assessor and in the process, (c) it provided a resource of artifacts, toys, and supplies that the child could use to express him/herself, (d) the physical space facilitated a way for the children to communicate and express their spirituality (e.g., dancing, praying, hiding, etc.), and (e) the selected space, even if already familiar to the child, became important and "special" during the follow-up interviews.

If there is flexibility in the space used, it is recommended that the child be engaged in the process of selection. For the children who were interviewed in their homes, asking them to select a space where they "felt special" or "where special things happen" allowed the children to become a part of the interview process and also facilitated their understanding of the "special" nature of our interaction. Across all of the second interviews, the children naturally and excitedly returned to their "special" space and the trust and sacredness developed during our first meeting was quickly re-established. Thus, consistency in the space selected is also important. Another possible setting children may choose to access is outside, perhaps in natural surroundings. If this is the case, the child may be invited to bring along important personal items to facilitate their disclosures, which may or may not be needed. It is also recommended that the assessor also have a kit of mobile play artifacts and non-verbal communication materials available for the children to utilize such as paper, pens/crayons, scissors, and glue.

Regardless of the setting selected, it is important that children feel safe in the space and that a certain level of privacy is also insured. Being disturbed or interrupted without warning during the assessment process would not be conducive to the children's sense of safety or privacy. However, depending on their age and comfort level with the assessor, the children may want easy access to their parents or at least have an awareness of their parents' presence close by. Reassuring children that they are able to stop or take a break at any time during the assessment process may also facilitate their sense of control and consequently, feelings of security.

Interview skills and techniques. While interviewing the children, it is valuable to be aware of and attentive to the children's emotional state and expressed feelings. For very young children, emotional communication may be expressed non-verbally as well as verbally and warrants attention by the assessor. By acknowledging or querying their emotions, the child is invited engage with the assessor about these feelings specifically as well as how they cope with or understand these feelings. Young children may not have the names for many emotions or make connections between life events and emotional responses. Thus, the assessor may need to label emotions for children, or predict natural consequences to emotions that are particularly painful. For example, if a child describes or reveals a stressful or challenging life situation, the assessor could label or describe the emotional outcome before engaging in spirituality themed dialogue.

Another important consideration while interviewing children is to provide them with the space and time needed to explore and reveal their spirituality. Given that these views have likely not been shared with others and that the children may be aware of the unconventional nature of their spirituality, they will require time to compose their own thoughts and feelings and to develop a level of comfort in their disclosures. When this occurs, it is important that the assessor's tone does not exhibit judgement or surprise, but rather a subtle curiosity and genuine interest. It will also be important at this time for the assessor to monitor his/her own spiritual assumptions and biases as well as expectations and hopes about the interview process and the children's spirituality. By taking on the perspective of a learner, a student of the child's, psychologists will be more likely to establish a genuine perspective of curiosity, interest, and non-judgement.

A generally calm flow and fluidity of the process would be recommended, although it may also be valuable to occasionally follow the child's pace and enthusiasm when markedly expressed. It is important however, while following the lead of the child, to maintain perspective as to the intention and purpose of the interaction. Hence, occasionally redirecting the child may be warranted, particularly for younger children.

When formulating questions about children's spirituality, as discussed in the "Methodology" chapter, it is important to remember that young children recall and express their experiences based on emotional and sensory connections, rather than chronologically or sequentially (Thomas, 2000). Thus, children's spiritual disclosures are likely to be tangential and difficult to follow unless concrete questions that are designed to elicit their emotional and sensory awareness and experiences are used. As well, linear questions may not be useful in understanding children's spirituality as they often describe unique interpretations that do not align with a time-oriented structure. Instead, inviting children to use non-verbal methods of communication including drawing and acting or using symbols and toys to communicate indirectly may also be helpful. Overall, it is recommended that interview questions are concrete, open-ended, and framed in relation to specific sensory modalities and emotional experiences.

Intervention

Spirituality informs one's worldview, and in particular how one conceptualizes health, healing and illness (Sue & Sue, 2003). These views then in turn have a direct effect on one's beliefs, thoughts, attitudes and emotions, which have demonstrated a direct neurological impact on health outcomes (Ray, 2004). In the *Handbook of Psychotherapy and Religious Divers*ity, Richards and Bergin (2000) emphasize the importance of understanding an individual's spirituality and their resulting worldview in relating to the client, establishing a therapeutic relationship, selecting and constructing therapeutic interventions, and facilitating and guiding the therapeutic process. Similarly, in an American Psychological Association publication, "*Integrating Spirituality into Treatment*" (Miller, 2002), the authors outline methods to assess and utilize various forms of spiritual resources accessible to individuals to enhance their therapeutic experiences including meditation, prayer, surrender, forgiveness, and communal support. Thus, understanding an individual's unique expressions and utilization of spirituality is critical to effective and ethical mental health care when it is expressed as a significant resource in their lives or is influential to their expressed or experienced worldview. Although the children in this study were not presently accessing mental health support at the time of the research, their expressed concerns and life challenges are not unlike others who do seek support and external help. Hence, understanding spirituality in children who express this as a key resource and influence in their daily living would be an important therapeutic endeavour and may expose a natural healing pathway that psychologists can validate and utilize in their practice.

There are several ways in which children's spirituality can be incorporated into the therapeutic process, including establishing therapeutic relationship and framing the child's worldview. Ways in which children's spirituality may be specifically related to intervention are listed below.

1. Validating children's perspectives and natural pathways for healing and coping by creating a space for these pathways to be discussed and exhibited in therapy. These natural and unique self-healing attempts can be recommended and integrated with other traditional forms of treatment that align with the children's perspectives. For example, the technique of "talking to God" can be integrated with traditional cognitive-behavioural therapy to facilitate change. Also, given that these techniques are self-generated, children are more likely to follow through with treatment recommendations and participate in the therapeutic process.
2. Children's spirituality may include active help-seeking behaviours of divine beings. This can be suggested and utilized by the therapist during times of difficulty or adversity disclosed by the child or as a way to prepare children to cope with future or anticipated life challenges.
3. Spirituality in children was often revealed as a way to make meaning of their life experiences. These constructions and views can be utilized therapeutically to help children understand and frame challenging life events and construct healthy life narratives.
4. Children's spiritual acts can be utilized directly in therapy as play re-enactments or direct therapeutic interventions. Similarly, significant spiritual artifacts, settings, or ideas could also be directly or indirectly utilized within the therapeutic setting. These opportunities would further validate and reinforce these healing pathways for the child that would facilitate their use and generalizability across other settings as well.
5. Children's spiritual structures could evolve and deepen with time when given the space and time to explore their spirituality within a trusting environment.

6. Involving parents in the therapeutic process that utilizes the children's spirituality would support and validate their views as well as guide parents to utilize their child's spirituality to cope with day to day challenges and difficulties.

Limitations

A major limitation of this research was that the immigrant parent-child dyads were selected based on relative proficiency in English. Given that none of the children who participated in this study spoke English as their first language and that language may be the main vehicle for spiritual and religious understandings, labels and experiences, the final presentation of the data may not reflect the full depth of spirituality among the immigrant children in this study. Furthermore, the final presentation of the data may not capture the experiences of spirituality as conveyed by children interacting in their first languages. In addition, as is the case with all qualitative studies, the research is limited by the small number of children interviewed. However, given that the participants were selected based on diversity in cultural backgrounds and religious or spiritual orientations, it is the hope that a diversity of children's spirituality and life experiences was also attained. The final limitation of this research is my own positive pre-conceptions about children and spirituality and my positive experiences of the interview process. These perspectives are inevitably intertwined with the research process and presentation of the data. Consistent with the hermeneutic approach, previous experience with the topic of study is considered to be an asset to the research process when pre-conceptions are consciously acknowledged and monitored (Ellis, 1998; McLeod, 2001), and subsequently presented and articulated in the research.

Given the nature of the research, it is difficult to determine if the children's spirituality expressed in this study are unique to immigrant children and distinct from spirituality of non-immigrant children. Conducting a follow-up study including both immigrant and non-immigrant children would help clarify any similarities and differences in the children's constructions, experiences, and uses of spirituality as well as in life challenges and adversity expressed.

Future Research Directions

The direction of research in the area of children's spirituality at this stage in the field is limitless. Very little research currently exists in the area of children's spirituality that is removed from association with children's religious education and religious, moral or faith development (Coles, 1990; Fowler & Dell, 2006; Piechowski, 2001; Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener & Benson, 2006). Hence, a move towards better understanding spirituality as a unique and important aspect of childhood is needed. From this view, more research is required to understand a wider cross-section of children's spirituality across ages, cultures, and religious orientations. As well, understanding how children's spirituality is constructed and how it evolves over time would facilitate a deeper appreciation of their sense-making and use of spirituality as a natural, self-created healing pathway, particularly if their self-generated spirituality is validated and encouraged as a resource of strength and coping. Furthermore, an understanding of how children's spirituality changes with increased religious teachings and exposure to societal norms would also be important. For example, as Ruiz (1997) and Hay, Reich and Utsch (2006) suggest, are children born with an innate spirituality that includes complete awareness of one's spiritual origin and oneness with all life that then diminishes over time?

With regards to immigrant children specifically, more research is needed to understand how children conceptualize spirituality as well as the role and function of spirituality in adjusting to various immigrant-related life stresses. Researching children's spirituality throughout their migration process, such as upon the decision to leave one's home country and upon immediate arrival into the host country, would further facilitate an understanding of children's emotional coping and adjustment during these very difficult life changes for themselves and their families. Similarly, it would also be valuable to understand how children's concepts of spirituality change or are impacted by the process of acculturation. This would be especially important to understand for the immigrant families who participated in the present study as most of the children were born in Canada.

Assessing children's spirituality in individuals who have not experienced or perceive themselves to have experienced life adversity would further facilitate our understanding of the origin and utility of children's spirituality. Given that each of the children interviewed disclosed a view of spirituality that served the general function of healing and coping with personal life adversity, it would be important then to further understand the role of adversity in the creation, use, and maintenance of children's spirituality. That is, do children develop a notion of spirituality only when faced with adverse life events or are they utilizing their existing notions of spirituality to understand and cope with their perceived life challenges? Furthermore, in a recent chapter, Ratcliff and Nye (2006) suggest the importance of advancing our ongoing understanding of the neurobiology of childhood spirituality. It would be fascinating for example, to have conducted the present research interviews in conjunction with direct neurological evaluation to determine whether or not children's disclosures aligned with Newberg and Newberg's (2006) current hypotheses regarding children's spiritual capacity and heightened neural connectedness. In addition, understanding the sensory experience of children's expressed spiritual experiences at a neurological level would provide insight into the "reality" of these experiences for the children.

As our understanding of children's spirituality advances, the areas of potential exploration will also expand. Given that this area of research is still new, the foundations of our understanding are still critical. Thus, further documentation of children's spirituality, particularly from their own perspective is still needed and is critical in defining, evaluating, and understanding children's spirituality and the role it plays in their lives.

Researcher's Experience

To personally witness and experience the children's explanations of their spirituality was an incredibly humbling and truly divine personal and professional experience. My relationship with each of the children was indescribably special and different from any encounter I have ever had with a child or individual with whom I have spent such little time. I was overwhelmed by how quickly and authentically the relationship developed and the mutual feeling of love, admiration, respect and connection that was felt and expressed.

Each experience enhanced my own understanding of spirituality and my professional view of children. Although I had always respected children's own beliefs in clinical practice, I had never truly taken on the role of a student in their presence. From this perspective, I became entranced by their words and actions and was in awe and amazement by their expressed wisdom. This was further enhanced by sensations of time slowing and feelings of movement into their world. There were no moments in particular where this sensation was more or less intense nor was it dependant on the specific content of the children's discussions, rather it was a felt sense from the start of the interviews to their completion. Interestingly, this sensation would often disappear when the interview concluded and I began "playing" with the child, as though the intention of our dialogue had been holding the sacredness of the experience.

Throughout this document, I have attempted to articulate my role as the researcher and the methods by which the children's stories were obtained. However, I must recognize that my way of being with the children and personal spiritual beliefs also contributed to this process. Although I do not believe it is necessary or sufficient to have an understanding of my own spirituality in order to engage effectively with the children through this process, it is likely that my own perspective was felt by the children and perhaps enhanced a connection with them that supported the entire research process.

Concluding Remarks

This research endeavour has explored spirituality among six children from immigrant families currently residing in Western Canada. Interviews with the parents and children suggest the capacity for very young children to construct, use, and establish complex and stable concepts of spirituality that are self-generated, unique, and sacred. The children in this study were able to create a sense of meaning of the world, of oneself and of being in the world, particularly during hardship. As a result, the children created ways in which to heal themselves and adjust to their present life challenges. This is a remarkable, perhaps innate, process for young children experiencing life stress and brings to mind the famous quote by psychologist, William James:

> Man is made or unmade by himself. In the armoury of thought he forges the weapons by which he destroys himself. He also fashions the tools with which he builds for himself heavenly mansions of joy and strength and peace.

REFERENCES

Abu Baker, K. (1999). Acculturation and reacculturation influence: Multilaye[illegible] contexts in therapy. *Clinical Psychology Review, 19*, 951-967.

American Psychiatric Association (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorder – Fourth edition –Text revision*. Washington, D.C.: Author.

Applied Research and Analysis Directorate. *Preliminary Report on Canadian Immigrant and Refugee Children*. Retrieved from World Wide Web on December 10, 2004, http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iacb-dgiac/araddraa/english/rmdd/wpapers/immigration02.html.

Arthur, N., & Merali, N. (In press). Counselling immigrants and refugees. In N. Arthur & S. Collins (Eds.) *Multicultural counselling: Canadian perspectives*. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Career Development Foundation.

Axline, Virginia, M. (1947). *Play therapy: The inner dynamics of childhood.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press.

Bandura, A. (1969). *Principles of behaviour modification.* New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Baptiste, D. A. (1993). Immigrant families, adolescents, and acculturation: Insights for therapists. *Marriage & Family Review, 19*, 341-363.

Barnes, L., Plotnikoff, G.A., Fox, K., & Pendleton, S. (2000). Spirituality, religion, and pediatrics: Intersecting worlds of healing. *Pediatrics, 106*, 899-999.

Barwick, C., Beiser, M., Edwards, G. In press. Refugee children and their families: Exploring mental health risks and protective factors. In M. Beiser, G.M. Devins, C. Barwick (Eds.), *Ethnicity and health*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Beck, H. S., & Gear, B. (1960). Latent culture: A note on the theory of latent social roles. *AdministrativeScience Quarterly, 5*, 304-313.

Beiser M., Dion R., Gotowiec A., Hyman I., and Vu, N. (1998). Immigrant and refugee children in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 40*, 67-72.

Bemak, F., Chung, R.C., & Bornemann, T.H. (1996). Counseling and psychotherapy with refugees. In P.B. Pedersen, J.G., Draguns, W.J. Lonner, & J.E., Trimble (Eds.), *Counselling across cultures -4th edition* (pp. 243-265). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Berry, J.W. (2003). Conceptual approaches to acculturation. In K. M. Chun, P.B. Organista, & G. Marin (Eds.), *Acculturation: Advances in theory measuring, and applied research*. (pp. 17-38). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Berry, J.W., & Kim, U. (1988). Acculturation and mental health. In P.R. Dasen, J.W. Berry, & S.N. Sartorius (Eds.), *Health and cross-cultural psychology: Toward applications* (pp. 207-238). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Benson, H. (1996). *Timeless healing: The power and biology of belief.* New York, NY: Scribner

Benson, P.L., Roehlkepartain, E.C., & Rude, S.P. (2003). Spiritual development in childhood and adolescence: Toward a field of inquiry. *Applied Developmental Science, 7*, 205-213.

Best, R. (1996). *Education, spirituality, and the whole child.* London, England: Casswell Publishing

Boti, M., & Bautista, F. (1999). When strangers meet. *National Film Board of Canada.* (Producer).

Boyd, M. (2002). *Canada's refugee flows: Gender inequality.* Retrieved December 1, 2004 from the World Wide Web: http://www.statcan.ca/English/ads/11-008-XIE/refugees.html.

Bowlby, J. (1951). *Maternal care and mental health.* London, UK: HMSO

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment. Vol. 1 of Attachment and loss.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Bowlby, J. (1973). *Separation anxiety and anger. Vol. 2 of Attachment and loss.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Brems, Christiane (2002). *Comprehensive guide to child psychotherapy –Second edition.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Bromfield, Richard (1999). *Doing child and adolescent psychotherapy: The ways and whys.* Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc.

Canadian Heritage (1998, December 21). Hate and bias activity in Canada. *The evidence series: Facts about multiculturalism*, 4.

Canadian Space Agency (CSA) (2003, May). *14th International Academy of Astronautics Humans in Space Symposium.* The Banff Centre, Banff, Alberta.

Coles, R. (1967). *Children in Crisis* (Volumes 1-3). Boston, MS: Atlantic-Little, Brown.

Coles, R. (1990). *The spiritual life of children.* Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Cole, B. S., & Pargament, K. I. (1999). Spiritual surrender: A paradoxical path to control. In W. R. Miller (Ed.), *Integrating spirituality into treatment* (pp. 179-198). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Clandinin, D. & Connelly, M. (1998). Personal experience methods. In N. Denzin & Y.Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (pp. 150-178). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Connelly, M., & Clandinin, D.J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher, 19*, 2-14.

Cresswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions.* London, UK: Sage Publications

Crotty, M. (2003). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process.* London, UK: Sage

Danesh, H. B. (1994). *The psychology of spirituality*. Victoria, British Columbia: Paradigm Publishing.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research. In N. K.Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research*, pp. 1- 17. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Dion, K.L. (2001). Immigrants' perceptions of housing discrimination in Toronto: The housing new Canadians project. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*, 523-540.

Dion, K.K., & Dion, K. L., & Pak, A.W. (1990). The role of self-reported language proficiencies in the cultural and psychosocial adaptation among members of Toronto, Canada's Chinese community. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication, 1*, 173-189.

Dion, K. L., & Kawakamni, K. (1996). Ethnicity and perceived discrimination in Toronto. Canadian *Journal of Behavioural Science, 28*, 203-213.

D'Onofrio, B. M., Eaves, L.J., Murrelle, L., Maes, H. H., & Spilka, B. (1999). Understanding biological and social influences on religious affiliation, attitudes, and behaviours: A behaviour genetic perspective. *Journal of Personality, 67*, 953-983.

Dunnigan, T., McNall, M., & Mortimer, J.T. (1993). The problem of metaphorical non-equivalence in cross-cultural survey research: Comparing the mental health status of Hmong refugee and general population adolescents. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 24*, 344-365.

Eisner, E.W. (2003). The arts and the creation of mind. *Language Arts, 80*, 340-44

Elias, J.L. (1991). The return of spirituality: contrasting interpretations. *Religious Education, 86*, 455-466.

Ellis, J. (1998). Interpretive inquiry as a formal research process. In. J. Ellis (ed.) *Teaching from Understanding: Teacher as interpretive inquirer* (pp. 15-32). New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc.

Ellison, C.W. (1983). Spiritual well-being: Conceptualization and measurement. *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 11*, 330-340.

Farran, C. J., Herth, K. A., & Popovich, J. M. (1995). Part 1: Conceptual and Theoretical Issues (pp. 7-40). *Hope and hopelessness: Critical clinical constructs*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Frangoulls, S., Jordan, N., & Lansdown, R. (1996). Children's concepts of an afterlife. *British Journal of Religious Education, 18*, 114-123.

Folkman, S., & Moskowitz, J. T. (2000). Positive affect and the other side of coping. *American Psychologist, 55*, 647-654.

Fowler, J.W. (1981). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row.

Fowler, J.W., & Dell, M.L. (2006). Stages of faith from infancy through adolescence: Reflections on three decades of faith development theory. In, E.C. Roehlkepartain, P.E., King, L. Wagener, & P.L. Benson (Eds.) *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence* (pp. 34-46). London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Fowler, J.W., & Dell, M.L. (2004). Stages of faith and identity: Birth to teens. *Child & Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 13,* 17-33.

Fukuyama, M. A., and Sevig, T. D. (1999). *Integrating spirituality into multicultural counselling.* Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Gadamer, H.G. (1995). *Truth and Method,* 2nd (Revised edition). New York, NY: Continuum.

Gallagher, S. (1992). *Hermeneutics and education.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Gentner, D., & Goldin-Meadow, S. (Eds). (2003). *Language in mind; Advances in the study of language and thought.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Gopnik, A., Meltzoff, A. N., & Kuhl, P. K. (1999). *The scientist in the crib: Minds, brains, and how children learn.* New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, Inc.

Government of Canada (2001). *Canadian multiculturalism act.* Retrieved December 10, 2004, from http://www.pch.gc.ca/multi/policy/act_e.sthml.

Granqvist & Dickie (2006). Attachment and spiritual development in childhood and adolescence. In, E.C. Roehlkepartain, P.E., King, L. Wagener, & P.L. Benson (Eds.) *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence* (pp. 197-210). London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Guarnaccia, P. J, & Lopez, S. (1998). The mental health and adjustment of immigrant and refugee children. *Child & Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America. Vol 7(3),* 537-553.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Guernina, Z. (1993). Transcultural family therapy. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 6*, 365-371.

Gladding, S.T. (2004). *Counselling: A comprehensive profession - Fifth Edition.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Harrision, C. (2000). Out of the mouth of babes: Spiritual awareness and the young gifted child. *Advanced Development Journal, 9*, 31-43.

Hart, T. (2003). *The secret spiritual world of children.* Maui, Hawaii: Inner Ocean Publishing.

Hay, D. (2000). Spirituality versus individualism: Why we should nurture relational consciousness. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 5*, 37-48.

Hay, D. (1997). Spiritual education and values. *The International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 2*, p. 5-15.

Hay, D., & Nye, R. (1998). *The spirit of the child.* London, England: Fount Paperbacks, HarperCollins Publishers.

Hay, D., Reich, K.H., & Utsch, M. (2006). Spiritual development: Intersections and divergence with religious development. In, E.C. Roehlkepartain, P.E., King, L. Wagener, & P.L. Benson (Eds.) *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence* (pp. 46-59). London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Health Canada (1999). *Canadian research on immigration and health.* Ottawa, Ontario: Health Canada.

Hicks, R., Lalonde, R.N. & Pepler, D. (1993). Psychosocial consideration in the mental health of immigrants and refugee children. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental* Health *12*, 71-87.

Hill, P.C., & Hood, R. (1999). *Measures of Religiosity*. Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press.

Hill, P. C., & Pargament, K. I. (2003). Advances in the conceptualization and measurement of religion and spirituality: Implications for physical and mental health research. *American Psychologist,58*, 64-74.

Hill, P.C., Pargament, K.I., Hood, R.W., McCullough, M.E., Swyers, J., Larson, D.B., & Zinnbauer, B.J. (2000). Conceptualizing religion and spirituality: Points of commonality, points of departure. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 30*, 51-77.

Hoffman, E. (1992). *Visions of innocence: Spiritual and inspirational experiences of childhood.* Boston, Massachusetts: Shambhala.

Hoffman, E. (1998). Peak experiences in childhood: An exploratory study. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 38*, 109-120.

Hofstede, G. (1980). *Cultures consequences: International differences in work related values.* Beverly Hills, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Houskamp, B.M., Fisher, L.A., & Stuber, M.L. (2004). Spirituality in children and adolescents: research findings and implications for clinicians and researchers. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 13*, 221-230.

Hubble, M.A., Duncan, B. L., & Miller, S. (1999). (Eds.). *The heart & soul of change: What works in therapy.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Hull, J. M. (2000). Spiritual development: Interpretations and applications. *British Journal of Religious Education, 24*, 171-182.

James, W. (1961). *The varieties of religious experience: A study in human nature.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Original work published in 1902).

Johnson-Bailey (2004). Enjoining positionality and power in narrative work: Balancing contentious and modulating forces. In K De Marrais & S. Lapan (Eds.). *Foundations for research methods in education and the social sciences* (pp. 123-138). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Kalin, R., & Berry, J.W. (1996). Interethnic attitudes in Canada: Ethnocentrism, consensual hierarchy and reciprocity. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Sciences, 28*, 253-261.

Kazdin, A.E. (2003). Psychotherapy for children and adolescents. *Annual Review of Psychology, 54*, 253-276.

Kibby, M.W. (1995). *Practical steps for informing literacy instruction: A diagnostic decision-making model*. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.

Kirkpatrick, L.A. (1998). God as a substitute attachment figure: A longitudinal study of adult attachment style and religious change in college students. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 24*, 961-973.

Kirkpatrick, L.A. (1999). Attachment and religious representations and behaviour. In, J. Cassidy & P.R. Shaver (Eds.) *Handbook of attachment theory and research* (pp. 803-822). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Klass, D. (1991). Religious aspects in the resolution of parental grief: Solace and social support. *Prevention in Human Services, 10*, 187-209.

Knight, N., Sousa, P., Barrett, J., Atran, S. (2004). Children's attributions of beliefs to humans and God: cross-cultural evidence. *Cognitive Science, 28*, 117-126.

Koeng, H.G. (1997). *Is religion good for your health? The effects of religion on physical and mental health.* New York, NY: Haworth Press.

Koeng, H.G., & Larson, D.B. (2001). Religion and mental health: Evidence for an association. *International Review of Psychiatry, 13*, 67-78.

Koepfer, S.R. (2000). Drawing on the spirit: embracing spirituality in pediatrics and pediatric art therapy. Art Therapy: *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association, 17*, 188-194.

Lago, C., & Thompson, J. (1996). *Race, culture and counselling*. Bristol, PA: Open University Press.

Landrine, H., & Klonoff, E. A. (1992). Culture and health-related schema: A review and proposal for interdisciplinary integration. *Health Psychology, 11*, 267-276.

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer

Jayinng, F., Wagner, N., & Tata, S. P. (1995). Racial and ethnic variations in help-seeking attitudes. In J. Ponterotto, M. Casas, L. Suzuki, & C. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 415-438) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing

Levenbach, D., & Lewak, B. (1995). Immigration: Going home or going to pieces. *Contemporary Family Therapy, 17*, 379-394.

Levine, S. (1999). Children's cognition as the foundation of spirituality. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 4*, 121 – 140.

Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Mabe, P.A., & Josephson, A.M. (2004). Child and adolescent psychopathology: spiritual and religious perspectives. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 13*, 11-125.

Mahler, M.S. (1975). On the current status of the infantile neurosis. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, 23*(2), 327-333.

Maslow, A. (1968/1999). *Toward a Psychology of Being*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons

Masten, A.S. (1994). Resilience in individual development: Successful adaptation despite risk and adversity. In M.C. Wang & E.W. Gordon (Eds.), *Educational resilience in inner city America: Challenged and prospects* (pp. 3-25). Hillside, NJ: Erlbaum.

Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience process in development: Contribution from the study of study children who overcome adversity. *Development and Psychopathology, 2*, 425-444.

Matsumoto, D. (2000). Understanding and defining culture. In D. Matsumoto, *Culture and psychology:People around the world* (pp.17-52). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

McGoldrick, M., & Giordano, J. (1996). Overview: ethnicity and family therapy. In M. McGoldrick, J. Giordano, & J.K. Pearce (Eds.). *Ethnicity and family therapy – second edition* (pp. 2-26). New York, NY: Guildford Press.

McGoldrick, M., Preto, N. G., Hines, P. M., & Lee, E. (1981). Ethnicity and family therapy. In A. S. Gurman & D. P. Kniskern (Eds.) *Handbook of family therapy, volume II*, pp. 546-582. New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel, Inc.

McIntosh, D. N. (1995). Religion as schema, with implications for the relation between religion and coping. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 5*, 1-16.

McLeod, J. (2001). *Qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Menninger, K. (1959). Hope: The academic lecture. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 116*, 481-491.

Merali, N. (2004). Family experiences of Central American refugees who overestimate intergenerational gaps. *Canadian Journal of Counselling, 38*, 91-103.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.* San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. (Ed.). (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis.* San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.

Metropolis website. New Canadian Children and Youth Study. Retrieved from the World Wide Web, on January 4, 2005 from: *http://ceris.metropolis.net/Virtual%20Library/health/beiser1.html*

Miller. W.R. (Ed). (2002). *Integrating spirituality into treatment*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Miller, W. R., & Thoresen, C. E. (2003). Spirituality, religion, and health: An emerging research field. *American Psychologist, 58*, 24-35.

Moncher, F.J. & Josephson, A.M. (2004). Religious and spiritual aspects of family assessment. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics, 13*, 49-70.

Nelson, P.L., & Hart, T. (2003). A survey of recalled childhood spiritual and non-ordinary experiences: Age, rate, and psychological factors associated with their occurrence. Retrieved February 14, 2006 *from http://www.childspirit.net/survey%200f%20childhood%20experiences.pdf.*

Newberg, A.B., D'Aquili, E.G., & Rause, V. (2001). *Why God won't go away: Brain science and the biology of belief.* New York, NY: Ballantine Books.

Newberg, A.B., & Newberg, S.K. (2006). A neuropsychological perspective on spiritual development. In E.C. Roehlkepartain, P.E., King, L. Wagener, & P.L. Benson (Eds.) *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence*, pp. 183-196. London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Nye, R. (1999). Reltational consciousness and the spiritual lives of children: Convergence with children's theory of mind. In K.H. Reich, F.K. Oser, & W.G. Scarlett (Eds.), *Psychological studies on spiritual and religious development: Vol. 2. Being Human: The case of religion* (pp. 57-82) Lengerich, Germany: Pabst Science.

Nye, R. & Hay, D. (1996). Identifying children's spirituality: How do you start without a starting point? *British Journal of Religious Education, 18*, 144-154.

Oaklander, Violet (1988). *Windows to our children: A gestalt therapy approach to children and adolescents*. Gouldsboro, ME: Gestalt Journal Press.

Packer, M.J., & Addison, R.B. (1989). *Entering the circle hermeneutic investigation in psychology.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Pargament, K. L. (1999). The psychology of religion and spirituality? Yes and no. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 9*, 3-16.

Pargament, K. I. (1997). *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice*. New York: Guilford Press.

Partida, J. (1996). The effects of immigration on children in the Mexican-American community. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 13*, 241-254.

Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods (2nd edition)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pérez, C. E. (2002). *Health status and health behaviour among immigrants* (Supplement to Health Reports, 13, catalogue 82-003). Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Statistics Canada.

Pernice, R. (1994). Methodological issues in research with refugees and immigrants. *Professional Psychology, Research, & Practice, 25*, 207-213.

Piaget, J. (1952). *The origins of intelligence in children: Translated by Margaret Cook*. New York, NY: International Universities Press.

Piaget, J. (1962). *The moral judgment of the child: Translated by Marjorie Gabain*. New York, NY: Collier Books.

Piechowski, M. M. (2001). Childhood spirituality. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 33*, 1-15.

Plato (1967). *Plato on the trial and death of Socrates: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Pnevmatikos, D. (2002). Conceptual changes in religious concepts of elementary school children. The case of the house where God lives. *Educational Psychology, 22*, 93-112.

Polkinghorne, D.E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. In J.A. Hatch & R. Wisniewski (Eds.), *Life history and narrative* (pp.5-23). Washington, D.C.: Falmer Press.

Powell, L. H., Shahabi, L., & Thoresen, C. E. (2003). Religion and spirituality: Linkages to physical health. *American Psychologist, 58*(1), 36-52.

Prendes-Lindel, M. (2001). A working model in counseling recent refugees. In J.G. Ponterotto, J.M. Casas, L.A., Suzuki, & C.M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 729-752). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Prochaska, J.O., & Norcross, J. C. (2003). *Systems of psychotherapy: A transtheoretical analysis* (5th ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Ratcliff, D. & Nye, R. (2006). Childhood spirituality: Strengthening the research foundation. *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence, pp.475-486*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Ray, O. (2004). How the mind hurts and heals the body. *American Psychologist, 59* (1), 29-40.

Reitz, J. G. (2001). Immigrant success in the knowledge economy: Institutional change and the immigrant experience in Canada 1970-1995. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*, 579-614.

Říčan, Pavel (2003). Spirituality in psychology: the concept and its context. *Studia Psycholologica, 45*, 249-257.

Richards, P.S. & Bergin, A.E. (1997). *A spiritual strategy for counselling and psychotherapy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Richards, P.S. & Bergin, A.E. (Eds.). (2000). *Handbook of psychotherapy and religious diversity*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Roehlkepartain, E.C., King, P.E., Wagener, L., & Benson, P. (2006) (Eds). *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Roof, W.C. (1993). *A generation of seekers: The spiritual journeys of the baby boom generation*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Press.

Rubin, H., & Rubin, S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ruiz, D. M. (1997). *The four agreements: A Toltec wisdom book*. San Rafael, CA: Amber-Allen Publishing.

Santiago-Irizarry, V. (2001). *Medicalizing ethnicity: The construction of Latino identity in a psychiatric setting*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Schermer, V. L. (2003). *Spirit & psyche: a new paradigm for psychology, psychoanalysis, and psychotherapy*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, Ltd.

Scheurich, N. (2003). Reconsidering spirituality and medicine. *American Medicine, 78*, 356-360.

Sciarra, D. T. (1999). Intrafamilial separations in the immigrant family: Implications for cross-cultural counseling. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 27*, 30-41.

Scott, D. G. (2003). Spirituality in child and youth care: Considering spiritual development and relational consciousness. *Child & Youth Care Forum, 32*, 117-131.

Selman, R. (1980). *The growth of interpersonal understanding*. New York, NY: Academic Press

Sexson, S.B. (2004). Religious and spiritual assessment of the child and adolescent. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 13*, 35-47.

Skinner, B.F. (1975). *About behaviourism*. New York, NY: Knopf

Sluzki, C. E. (1979). Migration and family conflict, *Family Process, 18*, 379-390.

Smith, D. (1991a). Hermeneutic inquiry: The hermeneutic imagination and the pedagogic text. In E. Short (Ed.), *Forms of curriculum inquiry* (pp. 187-206). Albany: SUNY Press.

Smith, H. (1991b). *The world's religions: Our greatest wisdom traditions*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers.

Smith, J. K. (1993). Hermeneutics and qualitative inquiry. In D. J. Flinders & G. E. Mills (Eds.) *Theory and concepts in qualitative research: Perspectives from the field*, pp 183-200. New York: NY. Teachers College Press.

Starbuck, E.D. (1899). *The psychology of religion*. New York, NY: Scribner.

Statistics Canada (1996). *1996 Canadian Census Report*. Retrieved Dec 1, 2004 from the World Wide Web: http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/People/Population/demo40a.htm.

Stern, R.C., Canda, E.R., & Doershuk, C.F. (1992). Use of nonmedical treatment by cystic fibrosis patients. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 13*, 612-615.

Stiles, W.B. (1993). Quality control in qualitative research. *Clinical psychology review, 13*, 593-618.

Strassman, R. (2001). *DMT: The spirit molecule: A doctor's revolutionary research into the biology of near death and mystical experiences*. Toronto, Ontario: Healing Arts Press.

Stuber, M.L., & Houskamp, B.M. (2004). Spirituality in children confronting death. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 13*, 127-136.

Suarez-Orozco, C., Todorova, I. L. G., & Louie, J. (2002). Making up for lost time: The experience of separation and reunification among immigrant families. *Family Process, 41*, 625-642.

Subota, N. (1986). Migration as one of the main causes of weak adaptation of the family. *Contemporary Family Therapy, 8*, 328-333.

Sue, D. W., Arredondo, P., & McDavis, R. J. (1992). Multicultural counselling competencies and standards: A call to the profession. *Journal of Counselling & Development, 70*, 477-486.

Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (2003). Dimensions of worldviews. In D. W. Sue & D. Sue, *Counselling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice (4th ed.*, pp. 265-289). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Sue, D. W., Ivey, A. E., & Pedersen, P. B. (1996). *A theory of multicultural counselling & therapy*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Thomas, R. M. (2000). *Comparing theories of child development – fifth edition*. Scarborough, Ontario: Nelson/Thomson Learning.

Tousignant, M. (1997). Refugees and immigrants in Quebec. In A. Al-Issa & M. Tousignant (Eds.), *Ethnicity, immigration, and psychopathology* (pp. 57-70). New York, NY: Plenum Press.

United Nations (1991). *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Ottawa, Ontario: Ministry of Supply and Services Canada.

van Manen, M. (1998). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Toronto, Ontario: Althouse Press.

Victoria, Marilda (February 16, 2003). Interview with local settlement counsellor. *Millwoods Welcome Centre for Immigrants*, Edmonton, Alberta.

Weinsheimer, J., & Marshall, D.G. (1989). *Truth and method*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Corporation.

Wenger, J. (2001). Children's theories of God: Explanations for difficult-to-explain phenomena. *Journal of Genetic Psychology, 162*(1), p. 41-55

Wilber, K. (2000). Waves, streams, states and self: Further considerations for an integral theory of consciousness. In Andresen, J. & Forman, R. K.C (Eds). *Cognitive models and spiritual maps: Interdisciplinary explorations of religious experience*, pp. 145-176. Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic.

Zinnbauer, B.J., & Pargament, K.I. (1998). Spiritual conversion: A study of religious change among college students. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 37*, 161-180.

Zinnbauer, B.J., Pargament, K.I., Cole, B., Rye, M.S., Butter, E. M., Belavich, T.G., Hipp, K.M., Scott, A.B., & Kadar, J.L. (1997). Religion and spirituality: Unfuzzying the fuzzy. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 36*, 549-564.

Appendix A: Study Description Form/Advertisement

What This Study is About

Spiritual and religious beliefs can affect how families deal with the challenges involved in moving to a new country. Very little is known about what children understand about spirituality and religion and the role it plays in their lives. This study is being done by Farah Nanji, a student at the University of Alberta under the supervision of Dr. Noorfarah Merali. Farah wants to understand how children of immigrants use spirituality and religion in dealing with life challenges. This study will help health care professionals who work with children to be sensitive to the families' spiritual and religious beliefs and to make sure these beliefs are respected when families go for help.

For this study, the researcher is looking for families who have immigrated to Canada and lived here for at least two years. At least one parent and their child (between the ages of 4-7 years) are needed for this study. Both parents may participate if they would prefer. The parents may use an interpreter but the child should be fluent in spoken English.

You and your child will talk to Farah. Parents will be asked questions about their cultural background and the reasons for leaving the home country, as well as the challenges the family has experienced before, during, and since moving to Canada. They will also be asked questions about the family's spiritual and religious background. Children will be asked about challenges they are facing and about their spirituality and religion. The talks will be scheduled at a time that works best for you and will probably take a total of three or four hours for you and your child. If you take part in this study, your family will be paid $75.00 for your time.

If you would like to be a part of this study, please tell ____________________at _____________(agency). She/he will write down your name and phone number and tell the researcher that you are interested. When the researcher calls you, she will ask you some more questions about you and your family and answer any concerns you may have. Then, the researcher may arrange a time and place to talk to you and your child.

Appendix B: Staff Confidentiality Agreement

Confidentiality Agreement

I, ___________________________, the staff member at _______________________________ (agency) have been asked by the researcher, Farah Nanji to record the names of those families that may be interested in being a participant in her doctoral research at the University of Alberta, Department of Educational Psychology presently entitled: Spirituality among immigrant children adjusting to adverse life events.

I agree to:

1. Keep the names of all those participants who express interest in or sign up for the research confidential by not discussing or sharing the information in any form with anyone other than the researcher, Farah.

2. Destroy the list of potential research participants names and contact information after the information has been transmitted to Farah

Name of Staff Member: ___________________ Name of Agency: _______________________
(please print)

Signature: ______________________________ Date: ________________________________

Signature of Researcher : __________________ Date: ________________________________

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Agreement to Participate

Spiritual and religious beliefs can affect how families deal with the challenges involved in moving to a new country. Very little is known about what children understand about spirituality and religion and the role it plays in their lives. This study is being done by Farah Nanji, a student at the University of Alberta under Dr. Noorfarah Merali. Farah wants to understand how children of immigrants use spirituality and religion in dealing with life challenges. This study will help health care professionals who work with children to be sensitive to the families' spiritual and religious beliefs and to make sure these suggestions are respected when families go for help. By signing this form, I agree that my child and I will participate in this study.

If I take part in the study, I know that my child and I will talk to Farah by ourselves. I will be alone or with another adult when I talk to Farah. When Farah talks to my child, I can watch her from another room if I want to be close to my child or if I want hear what my child says. Both talks will last one hour each, for a total of two hours for the family. I will be asked to tell about my cultural background and the reasons for leaving my home country as well as the challenges my family has experienced before, during, and since moving to Canada. I will also be asked to tell about my family's spiritual and religious background. My child will also be asked about challenges he or she is facing and about spirituality and religion. My child can use art and toys to share experiences if he or she wants to.

I understand that our talks with Farah will be tape recorded and Farah may take some photos of my child's art or play with toys. My real name and my child's name will not be anywhere on the tape because Farah will replace them with made-up names that I can choose. Our real names, the typed information, and the photos will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in Farah's office at the University of Alberta. The photos will only be of my child's art or play with the toys and not of my child's face. After the talk is over, what I said will be typed out by Farah on paper and only she will have our real names. Farah will create a family story using what me and my child said about our experience of coming to Canada and the role spirituality and religion plays in our lives.

Farah will phone me to arrange another time to meet with me and my child to go over the family story and to make sure she understands things correctly. At this time, my child and I will have a chance to add, take out or change anything in our family story. Farah may also ask a few more questions to make sure she has our family story right. This second meeting will take about one and a half hours for the family. Farah may make presentations or write articles about what she learned in this study to help other health care professionals understand immigrant families' life challenges and the role of spirituality and religion in their lives. My own words or my child's words may be used in the presentations or articles as examples of family spirituality. Nobody will know that the words she shares are mine or my child's because she will not use our real names.

If talking with Farah makes me or my child think more about what my family is going through, we may feel some stress or worry. I know that my child and I can get some help or support for free if I tell Farah what is happening.

I know that it is up to me whether or not I want to take part in this study and even if I sign this form I can stop being in the study at any time without any questions or problems. I also know that even if I sign this form my child can say no to be a part of this study without any questions or problems.

I understand that if I have any questions or concerns or want to know what Farah learned from this study, I leave a message for her at the University of Alberta at (780) 492-5245 or send an email to

Farah at farahn@ualberta.ca. I could also call Farah's supervisor, Dr. Noorfarah Merali at University of Alberta at (780) 492-1158. This study has gone through the University of Alberta's committee that makes sure that research is done properly and that people who take part in a study are treated right. This committee is called the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board. If I have any concerns about how this study is being done or about my rights as a person taking part in it, I can call the Chairperson or head of the committee at (780) 492-3751.

Name of participating parent (please print) ______________________________

Son or daughter's name: ____________________

Signature of parent ________________________ Date: ____________________

Signature of Researcher ____________________ Date ____________________

Appendix D: Child Assent Form

My name is ______________________________ Today's date is ________________________

This form is to make sure that you want to talk to Farah about your thoughts and feelings
Please answer the following questions by putting a circle around your answer:

Example:

I like playing outside with my friends	Yes	No

1. Farah talked to me about this research study.	Yes	No
2. I know that I can stop anytime during our talk.	Yes	No
3. I know that Farah will not tell anyone what I say, what I think or what I feel; except for my parents.	Yes	No
4. If have any questions I know I can ask Farah.	Yes	No
5. If I need to talk some more after I finish with Farah, I will tell her.	Yes	No
6. I would like to talk to Farah, draw pictures and play with her.	Yes	No

Thank you for your help!